

Title      A Homecoming Festival: The Application of the  
Dialogic Concepts of Addressivity and the  
Awareness of Participation to an Aesthetics of  
Computer-mediated Textual Art

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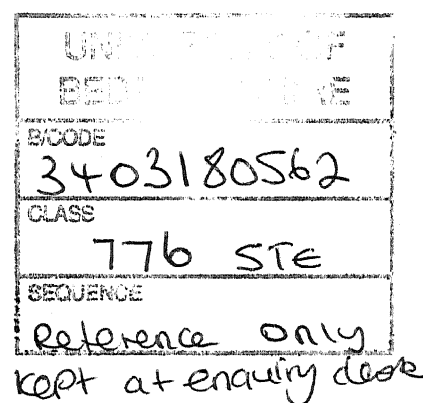
**A Homecoming Festival: The Application of the Dialogic Concepts of  
Addressivity and the Awareness of Participation to an Aesthetic of  
Computer-mediated Textual Art**

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**PhD**

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

**A Homecoming Festival: The Application of the Dialogic Concepts of  
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**Gavin Andrew Stewart**

**Abstract**

The recent history of computer-mediated textual art has witnessed a controversy surrounding the aesthetics of these texts. The practice-based research described by this thesis responds to this controversy by posing the question – Is there an aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art that can be used as the basis for a positive evaluation of contemporary practice? In exploring answers to this question, it poses three further questions that investigate the role played by materiality, participation and earlier claims for emancipation in the formation of an evaluation.

This thesis develops its answer to these questions by turning first to the work of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle to provide a generalised, architectonic model of meaning-making which serves as a conceptual framework for understanding computer-mediated textual art. This model describes meaning-making as a participative event between particularised individuals, which is defined, in part, by the addressivity of their shared utterance. This thesis then draws on the work of

Ken Hirschkop to argue that the addressivity of print-mediated utterances contributed to the obscuring of participation of the reader-participant in the event of meaning-making during the period of the national culture of print. It also argues that this obscuring of participation had an effect on the development of democratic consciousness during this period.

This thesis extends the concepts of the utterance and addressivity to describe computer-mediated textual art. It describes the historical context and the variety of aesthetic interests underpinning contemporary practice. It then argues that a sub-set of these texts exhibit a mode of addressivity that is different from the norms of the national culture of print. It draws on these differences to develop the original contribution of this thesis by describing an axiology (a theory of value) of computer-mediated textual art predicated on role played by their addressivity in raising awareness of the participation of the reader-participant in meaning-making.

This thesis then illustrates the theoretical assessments derived from these questions through practice. It details the methodology employed in this research programme. It then describes the motivations for this research, the course of study, the preparatory practice and provides a social evaluation of the technology deployed. It argues for a 'contingent' model of practice in which the design process is framed as a reflective experiment. It then provides an analysis of the design process of the computer-mediated textual art work 'Homecoming' to illustrate the arguments made in thesis. This thesis concludes by placing the new axiology into the wider cultural context by arguing that it provides a valuable but non-exhaustive, non-exclusive evaluation of these works.



## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Bedfordshire. It has not been submitted before for any examination in any other University.

Name of Candidate:

Signature:

Gavin Andrew Stewart

Date:

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This thesis is respectfully dedicated to the memory of John Moore.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Context of Study

In his keynote address to the 1999 Digital Arts and Culture Conference, Robert Coover declared that the 'Golden Age' of computer-mediated literature was over. Coover's pessimistic assessment of the state of this art form was not unique; however what made Coover's comments worthy of particular attention was that he was speaking as a leading advocate of computer-mediated practice<sup>1</sup>.

In his address, Coover held out the 1995 hypertext work *Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson as the ultimate example of the form. He argued that in reading this work a reader is "drawn ever deeper, until clicking the mouse is as unconscious an act as turning a page, and much less constraining, more compelling"(Coover, 1999). For Coover, the end of the Golden Age had been brought about by the introduction of hypermedia, such as sound and animation, and by the rise of the Internet in contemporary writing practices. The use of hypermedia, he argued, had marked a return to more traditional approaches that reduced the worth of contemporary practice. He similarly condemned the Internet as being unsuitable for serious literary work; describing it as "about as appealing as a scatter of old magazines on a table in the dentist's lounge." (Coover, 1999)

In a similarly valedictory gesture, Vuk Cosic, an artist central to the Internet art movement of the mid 1990s<sup>2</sup>, marked the death of the net.art movement in 1999<sup>3</sup>.

Julian Stallabrass, in recalling this gesture, noted that this 'death' was due, in part, to

the introduction of multimedia tools into artistic practice. Stallabrass summarized this argument by noting that:

“Software tools, particularly Flash, do less to develop the interactive character of the Web than to increase its allure as spectacle.”

(Stallabrass, 2003:126)

Significantly, both Coover’s and Stallabrass’s re-evaluations of contemporary practice were made against a background of criticism of computer-mediated textual art from critics such as Sven Birketts and Laura Miller (Birketts, 1994 and Miller, 1998). Miller, for example, described the experience of reading a literary hypertext as being “profoundly meaningless and dull” (Miller, 1998).

The views of Coover and Cosic, as well as those of Miller and Birketts have not gone uncontested. A number of practitioners and scholars have argued a positive case for some aspect of computer-mediated textuality (see for example – Coover, 1992; Joseph, 2003; Joyce, 1995:20; Landow, 1997:3; Lanham, 1993:xii; Montfort, 2005:233; Snyder, 1996:71 & Van Looy and Baetens, 2003:7). Jay David Bolter, writing as an advocate of computer-mediated textual art, asserted that:

“Electronic literary forms constitute perhaps the most important and visible avant-garde in our contemporary, and otherwise conservative, literary culture.” (Bolter, 2001: 122)

The debate surrounding the aesthetics of these works of art has been further thickened by the amazing array of neologisms that practitioners and theorists have introduced to champion their particular perspective (trAce Online Writing Centre, 2003: 4)<sup>4</sup>. They have variously categorized these works (or some elect sub-set of these works) as computer literature (Montfort, 2005:231), cybertext (Aarseth, 1997 and Ryan, 1999), digital art (Mencia, 2003), digital narrative (Murray, 1997), digital poetry (Funkhouser, forthcoming; Glazier, 2002; and Stefans, 2003), e-poetry (Glazier, 2002), electronic textuality (Ryan, 1999:16), hypertext and hypertext fiction (Joyce, 1995; Landow, 1997; and Snyder, 1996), interactive fiction (Sloane, 2000 and Montfort, 2005), interactive narratives (Douglas, 2000 and Leishman, 2004), Internet Art (Green, 2004 and Stallabrass, 2003), flash poetry (Howard, 2002), net.lit (Amerika, 2004:215), new media art (Biggs, 1998) and new media writing (Campbell, 2002). This maelstrom of complementary, competing and sometimes contradictory intellectual perspectives has resulted in considerable controversy surrounding the aesthetics of these texts. This situation has been complicated further by the fact that many of the view points represented above drew their evaluations of these texts from a wide ranging cultural debate about the impact of computing and networked digital communications on contemporary society.

A wide range of advocates have claimed a beneficial role for these technologies. In the 1990s, for example, cultural figures as diverse as Bill Gates and Al Gore made a case for the economic potential of network computing (Gore, 1993 & Gates, 1995:4). Others argued for their cultural benefits (see for example – Ascott, 1991:115; Benedikt, 1991:2; Barlow, 1996; Landow, 1997:89; Lanham, 1993:108; Negroponte, 1995:58; and Rheingold 1993).



Making claims for the cultural benefits of these technologies is not new. Richard Wise observed that many pioneers of computing made the claim that the widespread adoption of the technology was “an irreversible advance for democracy, community and a decentralised society” (Wise, 2000:38). A number of social and political ‘benefits’ have also been appropriated in support of the aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art.

Claims for emancipation reach back to the early days of computing. Stephen Levy, for example, noted that members of Tech Model Railway Club at MIT developed the Hacker Ethic, which included the maxim “Computers can change your life for the better” (Levy, 1984:41). Similarly, the hypertext pioneer Ted Nelson claimed that he had “intended to re-kindle the freedoms of yesterday and extend them into the electronic future of tomorrow” (Nelson, 1993: The Story); whilst the futurologist Alvin Toffler described a positive role for communications technology in the realisation of ‘anticipatory democracy’ (Toffler, 1975:433).

Somewhat predictably, the specific claims made by early advocates of network computing have been questioned (Century, 2004:Chapter 2; Fidler, 1997:189; Gaggi, 1997:xiii; Jordan, 1999:85; and Rifkin, 2000:223), lamented (Graham, 1999:90; Greene, 2004:13; Meadows, 2003:18; and Ryan, 2001:57) and refuted by counter-claim (Alexei Shulgin quoted in Stallabrass, 2003:61). Former Internet-advocate Clifford Stoll, for example, challenged the claim that the Internet could be used to support effective communities; noting that he had encountered “an over-promoted, hollow world, devoid of warmth and human kindness” (Stoll, 1995:233). Likewise,

Jane Yellowlees Douglas challenged the democratic claims made for hypertext (Landow, 1997:89), observing that:

“Hypertext is not inherently democratic or liberating or egalitarian any more than it is implicitly more limiting, more authoritarian than print” (Douglas, 2000:147)

The complex maelstrom of contradictory intellectual perspectives surrounding the aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art has, therefore, been convoluted further by the changing fortunes of the various contending discourses that have sought to construct network computing within contemporary Western society.

## 1.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question addressed by this thesis is, therefore, at heart, a simple but pertinent one (both in guiding my own practice as an artist working with computer-mediated textual art and to the on-going debate described in 1.1 above):-

Is there an aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art that can be used as the basis for a positive evaluation of contemporary practice?

In answering this question, this thesis asks three subsidiary questions; the first addressed at the related controversies surrounding the use of the Internet and multimedia in contemporary practice; the second addressed at the relationship between materiality, participation and the cultural value of these texts; and the third addressed at the relationship between the aesthetic value described by this thesis and earlier claims made for the 'democratic' potential of networked computers:-

Subsidiary 1. What role does materiality play in the formation of this aesthetic?

Subsidiary 2. What role does participation play in the formation of this aesthetic?

Subsidiary 3. What role do earlier claims for emancipation play in formation of this aesthetic?

At its core, therefore, this thesis takes the form of a traditional defence of an artistic practice (much in the manner of Phillip Sydney's 'An Apology for Poetry' (Sydney, 1998:134). It does not simply refute the condemnatory descriptions of the Internet-based computer-mediated textual art noted above. Similarly, it does not take unchallenged the positive comments made by enthusiasts. Instead, it argues the case for a positive evaluation by describing an original axiology (a theory of value) of these works of art.

Having established this original axiology this thesis takes its assessment as a call to action. The arguments presented by this thesis are, therefore, illustrated by examples of my own practice developed during the course of this research programme. These Internet-based, multimedia computer-mediated textual art works serve to illuminate the general axiology described in the theoretical discussions of this thesis.

My hypothesis, in answer to the main research question posed above, is a qualified yes, that there is indeed considerable aesthetic value in *some* of these texts within contemporary Western culture; and that it lies in the sense of the awareness of participating in the event of meaning-making that the addressivity of these texts engender in their reader-participants.

### 1.3 Summary of Chapters

Chapter Two begins with a re-evaluation of the assumptions underlying prior theoretical descriptions of computer-mediated texts. It does this by turning to the dialogic conception of understanding (set out by Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle) to establish a generalized model of meaning-making. This model is then appropriated as a base for further discussions of meaning-making in both traditional and computer-mediated forms. This chapter argues that participation is common to all acts of understanding. It also argues that computer-mediated textual art shares many characteristics with other, more traditional forms. It then develops Bakhtin's conceptions of uniqueness and addressivity to critique his concept of novelistic discourse and its role in promoting democracy.

Chapter Three begins by providing a historical context for contemporary computer-mediated textual art. It then discusses the addressivity of these texts. It argues that certain examples of these works exhibit a mode of address that is significantly different from the norms of print culture. It then critiques 'hypertext' and 'cybertext' aesthetic evaluations of computer-mediated textual art by placing them into a Bakhtinian context. It concludes by formulating an original, 'dialogic' evaluation of these texts predicated on the value of their addressivity to contemporary Western culture.

Chapter Four sets out the methodology adopted by this research programme. It begins by placing this methodology within the emerging epistemology of practice-

based research in the UK. It then describes the artistic context of this research. It also charts the material and social context that informed the design decisions taken during the course of this research programme. It concludes by developing the generalised concept of meaning-making described in Chapter Two to describe a Bakhtin-inspired model of practice. It does this to establish the epistemological relationship between the theory described in Chapters Two and Three to the practice reported in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five utilises the design process of the creative work 'Homecoming' to illuminate the original axiology (described in Chapter Three). It begins by providing an artistic statement for this work. It then develops the concept of addressivity by giving specific examples drawn from this process. It concludes by developing a more critical evaluation of both the concept of addressivity and the concept of practice set out in Chapter Four.

Chapter Six concludes this thesis by affirming the hypothesis set out in this introduction. It draws a number of conclusions about the subsidiary questions posed by this introduction. It then discusses the relationship between the axiology set out by this thesis and other aesthetic approaches. It concludes that the axiology described by this thesis is neither exclusive nor all-encompassing. Chapter Six then ends this thesis by discussing the implications of these research findings for further research and practice.

## **Chapter Two – Bakhtin: Participation, Print and the Novel**

### **2.1 An Introduction to Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle**

#### **2.1.1 M.M. Bakhtin**

Writing now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Russian polymath, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895- 1975) is celebrated as one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth-century. In his long and varied career Bakhtin produced a number of works on a wide range of subjects, such as discourse theory, the history of the novel and carnival, which have in recent years become influential in a broad array of contemporary scholarship. However, despite the breadth of his interests, and the fact that he lived through an age of rapid technological change Bakhtin appears to have paid little professional attention to the ‘new’ media, such as the cinema, telephone, television and the computer, being developed around him. In his private life, Caryl Emerson notes, he was something of a technophobe (Emerson, 2001:182). In his working life he makes a few scant comments about film (Bakhtin, 1984a:15) and drama (Bakhtin, 1984a:34 & Bakhtin, 1989:227), but tended to root his work in the study of books. Significantly for this research programme, he wrote nothing of note on the aesthetics of these emerging forms of mediation (Gardiner, 1992: 71).

Given Bakhtin's celebrity in academic circles, it is not surprising, however, that his ideas have been used by contemporary thinkers to discuss computer mediation and writing. For example, George P. Landow bracketed Bakhtin with Derrida and Barthes, and then refers to his concept of polyphony in his discussion of hypertext (Landow, 1997:33). Furthermore, Landow also argued that Bakhtin's writing practices demonstrate an affinity with "postbook technology" (Landow, 1997:88). Ilana Snyder introduced the notion of the dialogic in her work on hypertext fiction (Snyder, 1996: 79). Marie-Laure Ryan referred to Bakhtin's work on carnival (Ryan, 2001:186). Diane Greco referred to Bakhtin in her work on the politics of hypertext (Greco, 1996). Janice Walker used Bakhtin's notion of the utterance to discuss the rhetoric of hypertext (Walker, 1997). More recently, Jim Barrett used Bakhtin's conception of the chronotope to discuss narrative in interactive environments (Barrett, 2004) and Rachael Shave turned to Bakhtin's notion of the carnival in her discussions of slash fandom on the Internet (Shave, 2004)<sup>1</sup>.

The versatility of Bakhtin's ideas have meant that they have been used to inform contemporary writing studies as well; for example, both Frank Framer and Kay Halasek have produced book-length works on compositional pedagogy based on the work of Bakhtin (Farmer, 2001 and Halasek, 1999). Similarly, in the discipline of Creative Writing, Paul Dawson has argued for a pedagogical approach based on the sociological poetics of the Bakhtin Circle (Dawson, 2003)<sup>2</sup>. Cynthia Nichols drew together the themes of computer-mediated textuality and creative writing pedagogy; using Bakhtin's ideas to discuss the role played by computer media in the teaching of undergraduate poetry classes (Nichols, 2002)<sup>3</sup>.



Artistic practitioners have also turned to Bakhtin in support of their practice. In his paper ‘Negotiating Meaning: The Dialogic Imagination in Electronic Art’, Eduardo Kac, for example, appropriated Bakhtin’s notions of the dialogic to argue for “a literal (i.e. not metaphorical) interpretation of dialogicality in art” (Kac, 1999).

This thesis, however, takes a different approach from those noted above, by drawing directly on the translanguistics of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle (see a detailed discussion of this in 2.2 below) to describe a generalised understanding of meaning-making. It then develops their concepts of addressivity, participation and uniqueness to question Bakhtin’s aesthetics of novelistic discourse; as a vital stepping-stone to elaborating an original aesthetic rooted in Bakhtin’s concept of addressivity in the next chapter.

Bakhtin clearly regarded the issues of meaning-making as a central part of his thinking as he revisited and revised them in the essays collected in *The Dialogic Imagination*, before returning once more to them in the essays collected in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.

Ken Hirschkop argued that Bakhtin widened the scope of his investigations of the dialogic during this later work, moving from the novels of Dostoevsky, to the genre of the novel, to the global processes of the human sciences (Hirschkop, 1999:11). This thesis, therefore, embraces this outward trend and follows the trail blazed by Haynes (working with visual art), Stam (working with film), Joki (working with drama) and Page (working with television drama) by arguing that a number of the

key terms developed by Bakhtin (and the Bakhtin Circle) are of wider significance in understanding acts of meaning-making, and so can be appropriated in a discussion of the aesthetics of an art form not analysed by Bakhtin himself (see Haynes, 1995; Joki; 1993; Page, 2000; & Stam, 1989).

Of course, Bakhtin was not alone in the twentieth-century in providing a detailed account of language and meaning-making, for example Ferdinand de Saussure and the Structuralist, Roman Ingarden and Wolfgang Iser and the Reader-reception theorists, as well as the poststructuralist writings of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, all provide accounts of language and meaning. In fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, the aesthetics of literary hypertext, which underlie Robert Coover's assessment of the state of the art, are rooted in the Post-Structuralist traditions established by Derrida and Barthes.

It is worth pointing out that a number of the theorists noted above provide a more systematic and comprehensive approach to this subject. There is nothing in Bakhtin's fragmented works that compares with Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, for example (Saussure, 1983). However, despite these shortcomings Bakhtin's work on meaning-making recommends itself to developing an aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art for a number of reasons explored in this and the next chapter; in particular

1. Bakhtin described meaning-making as a unique event that is established between socially-positioned participants, at a particular place and time;

- facilitating the development of a non-idealised, historic perspective on meaning-making and computer-mediated textual art (see 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.4).
2. Bakhtin's work describes the role of participation in all acts of meaning-making; facilitating the conceptualisation of participation in acts of meaning-making involving computer-mediated textual art (see 2.2.1 and 2.6).
  3. Bakhtin's work describes the role of materiality in meaning-making; allowing key distinctions to be drawn between print based works of art and computer-mediated textual art founded on arguments based on materiality (see 2.4 and 2.5).
  4. Bakhtin's work addresses the aesthetics of language and meaning-making in literature; providing a starting point for a discussion of the aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art in Chapter Three (see 2.3.1).
  5. Bakhtin's work evaluates the wider cultural importance of the aesthetics of literature; providing a starting point for a discussion of the cultural significance of the aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art in Chapter Three and Four (see 2.3.2 and 2.6).

Bakhtin's work, therefore, recommends itself to this research because it provides an architectonic base by which to describe and analyze acts of meaning-making<sup>4</sup>. It provides this thesis with the conceptual tools with which to describe its original contribution; namely, that the real-time manipulability of these texts (engendered by their digital materiality) can facilitate a renewed sense of participation in the event of meaning-making. This chapter and Chapter Three further explicate this argument, by noting that a renewed sense of reciprocity is important to the aesthetics of these texts

because their addressivity draws the reader-participants' attention to their role in these acts of meaning-making.

Bakhtin's work also recommends itself to research that utilises a practice-based research methodology. For, as noted in point one above, Bakhtin argued repeatedly that the act of meaning-making was a participatory event. Bakhtin was, therefore, suspicious of the over-arching claims of theoretical discourse (see Bakhtin, 1993: 18 and Bakhtin, 1993: 21). In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, for example, he warned against over-abstracted and over-systematic approaches that sought to diminish the importance of experience. Instead, he argued repeatedly for the importance of a direct engagement with the work of art (or with any part of life for that matter). Bakhtin's early work further recommends itself to a practice-based methodology because he sought to provide a model that described the epistemological basis of authorship. These aspects of Bakhtin's work are investigated in Sections 2.2.5, and then developed further in the practice-based research epistemology described in Chapter Four.

The influence of Bakhtin's thought on my work is recognizable even beyond these extensive bounds. Caryl Emerson observed that the ambitions of the Bakhtinian method were not modest. She claims that it will "tell you how to teach, write, live, talk, think" (Emerson, 1997: 27). A quote from a late Bakhtin essay, for example, provided the initial impetus for the creative piece, 'Homecoming', reported in Chapter Five. Similarly, Bakhtin's description of the self/other relationship and the 'gift of the other' (discussed later in this chapter) provided inspiration for a number of the meditations that make up this piece.

This does not mean that the creative practice reported by this thesis is modelled entirely on Bakhtin's thought. For in many cases, I found myself compelled to conduct my practice as a way of answering back to Bakhtin's challenging conclusions. The themes investigated in the practical work 'Homecoming' are an artistic critique of some of Bakhtin's more optimistic assessments of language and meaning-making. Nonetheless, in recognizing this Bakhtinian influence, even in my contrary positions, I feel that I am in good company. The eminent Russian classicist Sergei Averintsev, for example, once praised Bakhtin's work by noting:-

“Agree or disagree, that's not at issue here: there are books after which it is simply impossible to work in the old ways” (Averintsev, in Emerson, 1997:113)

### **2.1.2 Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle: Issues of Authorship and Attribution**

Bakhtin's elevated status is a relatively recent phenomenon. Bakhtin's long working life spanned the difficult years of the Russian revolution, the Stalinist Repressions, the Second World War and the Cold War with the West, and, as a consequence, his work and that of his colleagues was for most of this time largely unknown. In fact most of Bakhtin's varied output remained unpublished until the very end of his life and as a result, he did not have a significant impact on either Russian or Western philosophical thought until the 1970s. The complex genesis of his ideas, the unorthodox method of their production, the painstaking processes needed to bring his long neglected manuscripts and notebooks to publication have made it hard to be certain of the dating and exact conditions of production of these key works. In particular doubt is the nature and influence of the relationship between Bakhtin and the 'Bakhtin Circle'. These issues, therefore, present a number of terminological difficulties that need to be addressed before discussing their ideas in detail.

In the 1920s Bakhtin was a leading figure in a loose association of young like-minded Russian intellectuals that included Valentin Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev. This grouping has, in hindsight, become known by the term the 'Bakhtin Circle'. Significantly, it was during this phase of Bakhtin's career that he came to recognize the full importance of participation to meaning-making. At about the same time, Medvedev and Voloshinov also formulated similar ideas about language, reflecting the considerable dialogue that was taking place between them at that time.

The arguments presented in this thesis, therefore, reflect this productive dialogue. It draws on Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* and Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* as well as Bakhtin's work. Bakhtin himself noted that these three authors had "a shared conception of language and discursive production" (Bakhtin - Letter to Vadim Kozhinov 10<sup>th</sup> January 1961 quoted by Medvedev and Medvedeva, 2004: 37). However, in bringing the ideas of these three thinkers under one banner it will keep in mind David Shepherd's warning about the "inconstancy, fluidity and informality" of the relationships being described by this grouping (Shepherd, 2004:6). Similarly it will keep a wary eye on the ongoing controversy that surrounds the attribution of the authorship of the texts concerned.

It has been suggested that Bakhtin wrote most or even all of the works noted above (Clark & Holquist, 1984:166 and Emerson, 1997:3). Other scholars such as Medvedev and Medvedeva, however, argue that there is considerable documentary evidence available to support the argument that Voloshinov and Medvedev are the authors of the works attributed to them (Medvedev and Medvedeva, 2004:28). More recently, works attributed to Bakhtin have also become embroiled in controversy. It has been suggested that a section of *Rabelais and His World* was copied from an earlier work by Ernst Cassirer; an act that the leading Bakhtin scholar Michael Holquist has described as "sheer plagiarism" (Holquist, 1998: 782).

Whilst recognizing the importance of attribution and the difficulties of terminology presented by this dispute, this thesis has nothing further to add to this debate. It will, therefore, follow the convention of using the 'Bakhtin Circle' as a collective term for

the work produced during the period of close collaboration and the individual name of the author to which the publishers have attributed the work in all quotes and references used when referring to their work.

### **2.1.3 Beyond the Bakhtin Circle: Dialogism**

It is inevitable that a number of contemporary thinkers have also influenced the arguments made in this thesis. As Caryl Emerson noted, Bakhtin's body of work is somewhat "opportunistic, unreliable, imperfectly coordinated" (Emerson, 2001:178) with the "Aesopian texture of ... "survivorly" writings" (Emerson, 1997:17)<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore Bakhtin's writing style can be dense and repetitive (Gardiner, 1992:180). Bakhtin's work has, therefore, been treated to considerable re/interpretation by scholars such as Caryl Emerson, Ken Hirschkop, Michael Holquist, Michael Gardiner, David Shepherd and Tzvetan Todorov. The detailed understanding of meaning-making and the aesthetic of computer-mediated text described below has been formed in scholarly dialogue with all of these influences.



## 2.2 The Dialogism of the Bakhtin Circle: An Architectonic Approach to Meaning Making

### 2.2.1 The Bakhtin Circle: The Utterance, Participation and Responsive Understanding

Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov described all acts of meaning-making using the metaphor of spoken dialogue, conceptualising it as an event between particular individuals, spatially- and temporally-located in particular social conditions. Critically for the Bakhtin Circle meaning-making requires at least two direct participants (an author-participant and a reader-participant, in the case of a work of computer-mediated textual art), as well as the wider participation of the cultural, linguistic and material context. As Voloshinov notes, dialogue is “the effect of interaction between speaker and listener produced via the material of a particular sound complex” (Voloshinov, 1973:102). The Bakhtin Circle regarded all acts of meaning-making, from face-to-face conversation to reading a book, in a similar light; describing them as active and participative. They termed the central event of this active, participatory meaning-making event as the *utterance*.

For the Bakhtin Circle the utterance is always a social phenomenon. The utterance can not belong to an individual. As a result of this description the Bakhtin Circle describe meaning and value as being neither subjective nor objective, but instead by the social concept of inter-subjectivity. This is crucial for understanding the utterance, for as Holquist notes:-

"It is this fated in-between-ness of all utterances which insures that communication can take place only in society, for the rules that determine precedence in speaking, develop out of group practice" (Holquist, 1990:60)

This account of meaning-making is significant for this discussion because it marks a break with the traditional linguistic diagram that posits meaning as the transfer of information from a sender (a speaker or novelist) to the receiver (a listener or reader). Instead, this situational, event-based concept of meaning-making is dependent on the participatory concept of *responsive understanding*. As Voloshinov notes, meaning is "realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding" made by the listener-/ reader-participant to the utterance (Voloshinov, 1973:102).

This point is of key importance because computer-mediated textual art has been discussed in binary opposition to books (and other traditional art forms). In these kinds of arguments, enthusiasts of computer-mediated works used participation as an opportunity to valorise computer-mediated textual art over other art forms. Stephen Holtzman, for example argued that:-

"The digital experience is interactive, not passive. Digital worlds respond to you, pull you in, demand your participation" (Holtzman, 1997:128)

Similarly, Nandy Millan noted that in the digital world readers were:

“Leaving behind the traditional, passive, distant and safe role of mere spectators in order to adopt an active part” (Millan, 2001)

In arguing in this way, these authors run the risk of claiming participation as a unique quality of these texts. In contrast, the work of the Bakhtin Circle suggests that computer-mediated textual art is indeed participative, but that this is a condition that they share with all other events of meaning-making; as any engagement with a text, computer-mediated or otherwise will, in their view, involve the participation of the reader-participant.

Participation is, therefore, a central concept in the Bakhtin Circle’s conception of meaning-making. However, as the young Bakhtin pointed out, he was not the first to recognize the centrality of participation to meaning-making. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* he claims that “participative thinking predominates in all great systems of philosophy” (Bakhtin, 1993: 8). Examples of this awareness of participation can be found throughout the Western literary-critical tradition. In the *Art of Rhetoric*, for example, Aristotle describes the enthymeme, an incomplete syllogism, which requires the audience to participate in the act of reasoning by providing a missing piece of the argument (Aristotle, 1991:194). Marie-Laure Ryan notes that participation was the corner stone of the religious exercises devised by Ignatius of Loyola (Ryan, 2001:116). The Eighteenth Century novelist, Laurence Sterne, also asserted the value of participation by noting:-

“No author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect you

can pay to your reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine”( Sterne, 1997:88)

Turning to the Twentieth-century, Maria Mencia argues that the European avant-garde broke with syntax in order to find “ways to make the viewer/reader a fuller participant” in the reading experience (Mencia, 2003:18). Similarly, Marshall McLuhan also referred to the concept of participation in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (see for example, McLuhan, 1964:82).

Most recently, the new media artist and academic, Donna Leishman also acknowledged the importance of participation to her aesthetics by noting:-

“I regard the audience as a participant rather than a user” (Leishman, 2004: Literature Review)

Bakhtin, however, stands out by placing participation at the very centre of all his thinking. Throughout his career he kept returning to this concept. In his early ethical work on the philosophy of the act he argued that one was under an obligation to be a participant in one's own life. His work with the Bakhtin Circle placed participation at the centre of their translanguistics; whilst in his work on Rabelais, Bakhtin drew attention to the participative nature of carnival (Bakhtin, 1984b:7).

Given these general observations about the ubiquity of participation, it is particularly significant that the works of the Bakhtin Circle hint at the importance of the materiality and addressivity to an awareness of participation (a conception explored

further in Chapters Three, Four and Five). This thesis extends the line of reasoning introduced by the Bakhtin Circle in order to develop an original conception of meaning-making with computer-mediated textual art in Chapter Three. It argues that some computer-mediated works are marked out from printed works of literature by what Bakhtin terms their 'addressivity'; which provides the already-active reader-participant with a continuing and timely awareness of their participation in the act of meaning-making.

### **2.2.2 The Bakhtin Circle: Addressivity and Speech Genre**

From the term 'responsive understanding', discussed above, it is possible to see the value of the concept of the utterance in describing the reciprocal nature of meaning-making. For critically the utterance, as Voloshinov notes, always "makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn." (Voloshinov, 1973:72)

Bakhtin refined this linking notion of the utterance in his later essay *The Problem of Speech Genre* by developing the concept of *addressivity*. He noted that addressivity is "the quality of turning to someone" (Bakhtin, 1986a:99). It is the role of the addressivity of an utterance to establish 'a particular other' (to use Leith and Myerson's expression) who participates with their addressor in the utterance (Leith and Myerson, 1989:88). It is this act of turning (and of being turned to) therefore, that defines the extent and participants of a particular meaning-making event.

In Bakhtin's conception, it is the role of the address to ensure that the addressee is aware that they are being addressed. The addressivity of the utterance, therefore,

ensures that the addressee participates in the event of meaning-making being enacted. Bakhtin further argued that the addressor always takes “into account possible responsive reactions” of the addressee (Bakhtin 1986b:94) when addressing their utterance; that is to say, they strive to make their utterances answerable in a particular set of possible acts by the particular individual(s) being addressed. They do this by structuring their utterance in a manner that anticipates and facilitates the responses of their addressee (Bakhtin, 1981a:280).

It is important, therefore, to note that addressivity is a highly-charged recursive relationship. The author-participant (as the addressor) is never entirely free from their reader-participant and their social conditions in this model of meaning-making. Furthermore, it is important to note that the success of the utterance is dependent upon a sense of engagement between the participants in the utterance. The responses of the addressee do not have to be particularly articulate or extensive, of course. Lynne Pearce, for example, noted that grunts of agreement are an important element in the formation of effective telephone conversations (Pearce, 1994:3). Nevertheless there must be some sense of reciprocity and participation on the part of the listener/reader. Similarly, the reader-participant (as the addressee) is never entirely free of the author-participant because the author’s address forms the vital mechanism which establishes the existence and the basic structure of their shared utterance.

The social construction of the addressivity of any utterance, Bakhtin argues, means that language is always contingent and stratified (Bakhtin, 1981a:288) by social forces such as vocation, class, ethnicity, gender and age that produce and are produced by this stratification (Bakhtin, 1981a: 290). He develops the concept of the

*discursive* or *speech genre* to describe the effects of this social stratification of language. He notes:-

“When we select words in the process of constructing an utterance, we by no means always take them from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form. We usually take them from other utterances, and mainly from utterances that are kindred to ours in genre, that is, in theme, composition, or style. Consequently, we choose words according to their generic specifications. A speech genre is not a form of language, but a typical form of utterance.”

(Bakhtin, 1986b:87)

It is important to note that speech-genres are constantly being formed. They are waxing and waning, being born out of pre-existing genres, fusing together with other genres and being abandoned as the social situation changes. In a classical example of Bakhtin's thought, they are always in a state of becoming. It is also important to note that they do not comprise a system, or set of timeless codes capable of being described objectively, outside of time and place. They are not universally available to speakers and listeners. They are learnt and maintained through the social interaction of the participants.

The term ‘speech genre’ should not be regarded as being solely applicable to direct speech. The Bakhtin Circle noted that all forms of utterances, including academic essays, were stratified into genres. Bakhtin, himself, became particularly interested in the written ‘speech genres’ of the novel. In the essay ‘The Problem of Speech Genre’ he recognised that novels and other verbal art forms incorporate simpler forms of speech genre into long, complex, highly-structured written utterances that

Bakhtin grouped as secondary speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986a:62). For Bakhtin, the language structures of the novel were of particular interest because they were:-

"the image of another's language and outlook on the world,  
simultaneously represented *and* representing"(Bakhtin 1981c:45).

The 'new media' theorist Janet H. Murray argued that computer-mediated textual art shares much in common with its predecessors, such as the novel (Murray, 2003:3). This thesis will, therefore, follow her lead by extending the concepts of the utterance to describe the authoring and reading of computer-mediated textual art as well. It does this in order to recognize that they are newly-formed examples of secondary genres (plural), emerging out of a series of dialogues with pre-existing literary genres such as poetry and the novel, out of a series of dialogues with other newly-emergent computer-mediated genres, out of other artistic genres such as animation, photography, design and fine art, out of everyday contemporary conversations and interests, and subject to analogous (though not identical) social, spatial and temporal forces that defined the utterances described by Bakhtin.

However, while making this basic assumption, this thesis also challenges Bakhtin's terminology and assumptions, in order to identify the subtle but significant ways in which computer-mediated textual art varies from books and direct speech. It does this in a manner well-established amongst Bakhtinian scholars, by using the substance of Bakhtin's own arguments to challenge his own conceptions and aesthetic assessments. In particular, it will look at the key relationship between the materiality and addressivity of these utterances.



### 2.2.3 Speech and Writing: Dialogue and Dialogic

As noted above, one of the most striking features of the Bakhtin Circle's discourse on language was their continuing use of the concept of 'speech' or 'discourse' to describe all forms of language activity. Most of the key terms developed by the Circle reflect this philosophical predilection. However, Michael Gardiner points out that the Bakhtin Circle do not fall into the trap of 'phonocentrism' as their conceptions of meaning-making maintains that meaning is not 'self-present' in the written or spoken artefact; it always requires the participation of the author-participant, the reader-participant and the context for it to be realised (Gardiner, 1992:227).

Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov adopted this speech-oriented terminology, in part, as a reaction to the writings of the Russian Formalists and the early Structuralist (under the influence of Saussure) who saw language as a closed, formal system. In fact, in many respects Bakhtin and Voloshinov can be characterised as Anti-Structuralist as they vigorously rejected the notion that language or any other sign system was as an abstract, normative system (Voloshinov, 1973:94). They critiqued Saussure's work, arguing that it did not take account of the temporal or the social nature of meaning-making. This did not mean, however, that they were blind to differences in materiality between conversation and other forms of communication. It is important to note, therefore, that there is a key distinction to be made between dialogue and the dialogic in Bakhtin's thought; particularly as both concepts have now come into play in contemporary interpretations of his legacy.<sup>6</sup>

It is certainly true that Bakhtin valued face-to-face conversation (see Clark & Holquist, 1984:151). Caryl Emerson, noted that Bakhtin's close friend, Georgii Gachev, characterised Bakhtin as a *mezhdusoboinik* (a "just-between-you-and-me-nik) who "in place of God...deified the everyday interlocutor" (Emerson, 1997:5). Of course, Bakhtin was not the first thinker to relish face-to-face dialogue. Plato, some two thousand years earlier, described his mentor Socrates valorising conversation over books (Plato, 1973:101). However, as Ken Hirschkop pointed out, not all of Bakhtin's thinking can be reduced to a model based solely on "ordinary (i.e. spoken) dialogue" (Hirschkop quoted by Pearce, 1994:5). For Hirschkop, Bakhtin's work on dialogic discourse in the novel is particularly significant because in this work he identified a historical moment that went beyond the limits of face-to-face dialogue (Hirschkop, 1999:48). For in building his arguments about heteroglossia in works of art, and not on conventional face-to-face dialogue, Bakhtin was pointing out that "dialogues themselves were not up to the job, and that something new was required" (Hirschkop, 1999:4).

For Bakhtin, writing in the middle of the twentieth century this 'something new' was found in written dialogic discourse (firstly in the novels of Dostoevsky, then in all dialogic novels, and then finally in the discourse of the human sciences). However, this thesis argues that Bakhtin's own arguments about the ethical importance of uniqueness in meaning-making challenge his aesthetic assessments of these forms.

### 2.2.4 Context, Uniqueness and the History of the Word

The Bakhtin Circle always situated meaning-making in a social reality. This meant that they were acutely aware of the role of context. Bakhtin notes:

"we cannot, when studying the various forms of transmitting another's speech, treat any of these forms in isolation from the means for its contextualized (dialogizing) framework." (Bakhtin, 1981a:340)

At the end of 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin tackles the problems presented by context to the event of meaning-making. He describes this interaction as a process of re-accentuation (Bakhtin, 1981a: 420). This means that every event of meaning-making, every utterance, by being re-accentuated by its new context, is unique. The same reader-participant can read the same book, but changes in the reader-participant and changes in the context mean that it will not result in the same event of meaning-making. As Caryl Emerson, notes Bakhtin's:

"Entire understanding of the word, and of the specificity of utterance, invalidates the very concept of repetition. Nothing "recurs"; the same word over again might accumulate, reinforce, perhaps parody what came before it, but it cannot be the same word if it is in a different place." (Emerson, 1984:xxxv)

This concept of uniqueness plays a critical part in Bakhtin's understanding of participation. In his early 'phenomenological' work he drew attention to its

importance by describing it as “obligative” (Bakhtin, 1993:45); that is to say the uniqueness of the situation obliges the participant to try and embrace their participation and to become more fully aware of their role in meaning-making. Ken Hirschkop points out that this uniqueness is more than a mere spatio-temporal phenomenon; it also has ethical and political consequences. The uniqueness of the utterance involves its participants in a commitment or an act of position-taking, which in turn affects the inter-subjectivity of the participants (Hirschkop, 1999:211). To be a full participant in an utterance is to commit oneself to a particularized act of meaning-making in which the range of possibilities that were available prior to the utterance are extinguished. In this way, the utterance changes its participants and their context, bringing them a renewed awareness of themselves and others. Ken Hirschkop argues that: -

“the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ position, which we *cannot avoid*, is what makes the utterance unique and individually compelling” ( Hirschkop, 1999:211)

This ethical dimension of participation was an important element in Bakhtin’s early work; it informs his description of the self/other relationship (and is treated in depth in Section 2.2.5 below); furthermore, this ethical position plays a central role in his early aesthetic discussions, and so this concept will be returned to once again at the end of this chapter when critiquing Bakhtin’s aesthetic assessment of novelistic discourse (see 2.5.3).

There is, however, a danger of an inconsistency within Bakhtin’s theories that needs to be resolved; for in recognizing the uniqueness of the event and the dialogizing role of context in this event it makes it hard for him to then argue for the concept of

representation in a work of art. In this situation the reader-participant's understanding can have little basis in an original authorial contribution and the text can be best described as being indeterminate. In effect, 'the dialogue' is in danger of being drowned out by the context.

David Shepherd tackles this problem by breaking down the binary opposition of determinancy and indeterminacy, by pointing out that any process of re-accentuation has a social history. He states:

"a text continues to bear the marks of its past historical engagements which, as well as being open to recontextualisation, must also place some limit on the nature and degree of that recontextualisation. If the activity of reading is based on dialogic relations between reader and text, and text and context, then there are relations which have a past as well as a present." (Shepherd, 1989: 98).

History, as we are often told, is written by victors, and victory, in this sense, is largely achieved socially. A text continues to mean certain things, because a cast of concrete, historical, social-embedded actors (author-participant, critics, readers, publishers, editors, etc.) utilising the social setting, have successfully argued it so, up to the present time. This is why, as literary critics, we talk about our current readings of Barthes' 'Death of the Author' (recognizing the role of the author-participant, the reader-participant and the context of the utterance) despite its subject-matter!

This does not, however, mean that any reading of a text is entirely determinate. To stabilize meaning does not mean to fix it for all time. Any reading encounter with the text is still dialogic, involving the reader's responsive understanding as well as the

re-accentuation of the utterance by changes in context. The recent history of literary criticism has shown that a powerful participant-reading of a work, for example, the 'Madwoman in the Attic' reading of *Jane Eyre* (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979), can alter its subsequent history.

### **2.2.5 Uniqueness and the Gift of the Other**

Michael Holquist argued that Bakhtin presented "a philosophy of trees as opposed to a philosophy of the forest" in that he described human society as the "simultaneity of uniqueness" (Holquist, 1990:152). However, it is perhaps better described as a philosophy of 'trees growing in a copse' as the uniqueness of each tree, recognized by this metaphor, is not based on an autonomous or self-sufficient self, growing on its own, but rather, it is based on Bakhtin's conception of an open and changing self, realized in a myriad of unique relationships with others.

Bakhtin was not alone in focusing his thought on the self-other relationship. A number of twentieth-century thinkers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes used the self/other relationship as a key element of their thinking. Ann Jefferson has identified a similarity in the conceptions of the self-other relationship described by these three thinkers; noting that in all three approaches:-

"The subject becomes dependent upon the Other" (Jefferson, 1989:153).

However, as Jefferson notes, the optimistic approach taken by Bakhtin (in his phenomenological phase, at least) stands in marked contrast to the approach taken by

these other thinkers. In Sartre's work, for example the self/other relationship is described as a theft, a negation and an alienation (Jefferson, 1989:159), whereas in 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' for example Bakhtin notes that:-

"One can speak of a human being's absolute need for the other, for the other's seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity" (Bakhtin, 1990b:35).

For Bakhtin, this need for the other is a fundamental condition of being because the open-ended, on-going-ness of being means that the self is never being able to perceive of itself as whole. The other, however, being outside of this self has a different perspective. This means that the other can provide an 'excess of seeing' and this excess permits the subject to have access to a sense of its wholeness (Bakhtin, 1990b:23).

In Bakhtin's formulation, this excess of seeing is the gift of self-knowledge provided by the other to the self. Bakhtin, for example, argued that selfhood initially comes into being through the gift of parenting (Bakhtin, 1990b:49); noting (in a highly patriarchal passage) that it is the words of the m/other to the self:-

"that *come to meet* his indistinct sensation of himself, giving it form and a name in which, for the first time, he finds himself and becomes aware of himself as a *something*" (Bakhtin, 1990b:49).

Tzvetan Todorov argued that the concept of the ‘gift of the other’ is a key insight into the participatory quality of self/other relations because it recognized that there are “elements of consciousness that are external to it but nonetheless absolutely necessary for its completion” (Todorov, 1984:94). For the young Bakhtin, therefore, the role of the self is to become an author; to express their view of the world as a ‘gift for their other’.

However as the Trojans found out to their cost, not all gifts are to be welcomed. Ann Jefferson critiqued Bakhtin’s phenomenological work by developing the implicit self/other relationship expressed in Bakhtin’s later linguistic work. She argued that, contrary to the loving relationship described in ‘Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity’ the self/other relationship described by Bakhtin in his later work “does have its darker side” (Jefferson, 1989:163). In the late essay, ‘Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences’, for example, Bakhtin argued that the differences realized in a symbol give rise to both “the warmth of love and the coldness of alienation” (Bakhtin, 1986c:159).

These differing views of the self/other relationship and the ‘gift of the other’ provide a central theme explored in the creative work, ‘Homecoming’ (provided to illuminate this thesis).



## 2.3 Bakhtin: The Aesthetics of the Novel

### 2.3.1 Polyphony, Heteroglossia and the Multiply-inflected word

As noted earlier, it is hard to be certain about the exact date of production of many of Bakhtin's works. Ken Hirschkop, however, has suggested that it is possible to see a series of phases in Bakhtin's work, marked by distinct changes in the subject of interest. His early works, approximately 1919-1924 are shaped by Bakhtin's encounter with phenomenological philosophy. In this phase he is interested in authorship, participation, the self/other relationship, uniqueness and the dialogue of aesthetic creativity. The next phase, approximately 1924-1929, was informed by the translinguistics of Medvedev and Voloshinov. It was during this phase that he began to focus on the cultural significance of the word and the novel (that formed the central interest of his third phase); making the move from dialogue to dialogic identified by Hirschkop (Hirschkop, 2001:24). It was also during this phase that Bakhtin appears to have first conceived the rather unworkable notion of polyphony that he used to describe the work of Dostoevsky. However, as Hirschkop notes, after this initial set-back Bakhtin "encounters the novel in a new manner and he is changed by the encounter" (Hirschkop, 2001: 34). One of the important changes seen in Bakhtin's work is his detailed re-conceptualizing of the diversity of language; which he came to describe by the term *heteroglossia*.

Michael Holquist notes that Bakhtin's heteroglossia is "a way of conceiving the world as made up of a roiling mass of languages" (Holquist, 1990:69). The effect of this heteroglossia is that at any one time there are a huge number of different linguistic perspectives laying claim to an utterance. Heteroglossia, therefore,

‘dialogises’ the meaning of any utterance; that is, it places an utterance into a situation whereby it is forced into dialogue with what has already been said. From this realization, Bakhtin argued that there are no neutral words, no truth-statements, values or aesthetics free of social evaluation or context. As Bakhtin notes: -

“Any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already, as it were, overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the “light” of alien words that have already spoken about it” (Bakhtin, 1981a:276)

Bakhtin argued that an awareness of this heteroglossia of language was a challenge to truth claims of the authoritative word, in that it implies that no point-of-view can be privileged in having the last word on any subject. Bakhtin further argued that this was important because an awareness of heteroglossia broke down absolutist dogma and destroyed the illusion that any utterance could present timeless truth, qualities that Bakhtin criticised in epic texts (Bakhtin, 1981b:15).

The concept of heteroglossia is the cornerstone of Bakhtin’s aesthetic appraisal of the novel. He argued that “heteroglossia-in-itself becomes, in the novel and thanks to the novel, heteroglossia-for-itself” (Bakhtin, 1981a: 400)<sup>7</sup>. The artistic structuring of multiple points-of-view, facilitated by writing and the printed text, was the realization and representation of a new and valuable pluralistic cultural perspective that recognized the value of different points-of-view. From this, Bakhtin argued that the novel aided the development of a desirable form of human consciousness that recognized and embraced diversity and critiqued “repressive, authoritarian, one-eyed

ideologies" (Lodge, 1990:22). In the most positive of assessments of literary heteroglossia, the dialogic novel is extremely valuable for a pluralistic culture because it becomes, in Wayne Booth's words, "the best instrument of understanding that has ever been devised" (Booth, 1984: xx).

A number of commentators have taken issue with Bakhtin's valorisation of the novel. Ilkka Joki, for example, argued back to Bakhtin (using his own conceptual tools) to make the case for drama; noting that "the live voice of the theatre, can be even more dialogic than the novel." (Joki, 1993:64). Similarly, David Krasner appropriated Bakhtin's concepts to develop a 'dialogic' theory of drama (Krasner, 2004:3).

It is important to note, therefore, that a leading translator of Bakhtin's work, Michael Holquist, argued that it is a mode of discourse (rendered by Holquist as the term 'novelness') rather than the genre of novel itself that Bakhtin praised in his work (Holquist, 1990:72). This thesis, therefore, follows Holquist's lead by describing heteroglossia as an aesthetic based on novelistic discourse facilitated by 'print culture' (but realised in a wide variety of contemporary genres) rather than an exclusive aesthetic of the printed novel.

Others have noted the conceptual difficulties rooted in the term heteroglossia itself. Bakhtin used the term 'heteroglossia' both to describe the state of language in the world, and also as an evaluative term; as a condition to which language and literature, in particular, should strive. This multi-layered use of the term meant that there was a particular confusion about the antonymic term, 'monoglossia'. Bakhtin

seems on one hand to suggest that monoglossia can not exist, and then to suggest that it is ethical and aesthetically desirable that it be minimised (for example, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* where Bakhtin holds up Dostoevsky's dialogic works as being superior to the "monologic type" (Bakhtin, 1984a:7)). Ken Hirschkop has refined Bakhtin's concept by arguing that it should be seen in a historical light. He notes that the heteroglossia of novelistic discourse is best understood by placing it in the culture of modernity. Following the arguments of Roger Chartier, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, he described this culture as an innovation created by a national culture of print (see Chartier, 1989; Eisenstein, 1979; and Febvre and Martin, 1984). He argues that a new printed 'standard' language, that had the potential to be accessible to every literate person "could represent the still differentiated world of orality and written discourse, by portraying the multitude of dialects and styles which flourished at the oral and informal written level of the language" (Hirschkop, 1999:22). In doing so, it fostered the historic inter-subjective awareness that was a necessary characteristic of the democratic discourse of print culture. Hirschkop's historical approach also makes sense of the 'monoglossia' problem, for as he noted, it can now be understood as heteroglossic language "whose natural tendency is repressed or obstructed by some external force" (Hirschkop, 1989:5).

### **2.3.2 Heteroglossia and Democracy**

Bakhtin's claims for heteroglossia and the novel have also been questioned by Michael Gardiner who notes that Bakhtin overestimates the ability of dialogic literature to "effect the liberation of human consciousness from the grip of

monologism" (Gardiner, 1992:176). The troubles visited on the Bakhtin Circle during the Stalinist period show quite vividly the kinds of naked aggression that a totalitarian system can use to suppress oppositional voices. Bakhtin was sent into internal exile (having narrowly avoided being sent to a Labour Camp) in 1930 and Pavel Medvedev was arrested and then executed by the regime in 1938 (see Brandist, Shepherd and Tihanov, 2004:251). In *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* Ken Hirschkop recognized the very real threats posed by authoritarianism, by noting that at first sight language is an odd location to place one's hopes for a pluralistic society. However, he then argued that by looking at the correctives to the totalitarian tendency, at concepts of representative democracy and equal rights, developed during the modern period we see that they are "not the product of institutions above society but of the linguistic intersubjectivity which constitutes it" (Hirschkop, 1999: 36). In this formulation, democratic consciousness is, therefore, not so much saved by dialogic language use; democratic consciousness *is* dialogic language use.

This thesis also questions Bakhtin's assessment of the cultural value of the dialogic novel by taking a slightly different tack; by arguing that the representation of heteroglossia in printed novels, necessary for nourishing the democratic intersubjectivity discussed above, was bought at a 'price' (discussed in 2.5.3 below as the 'price of print'). To explore this idea further, the next section reviews the relationship between materiality and addressivity in Bakhtin's thought. It does this in order to argue that the addressivity of print culture has had a significant effect on meaning-making within this culture; and to develop the necessary conceptual tools for discussing the materiality and addressivity of computer-mediated textual art in Chapter Three.

## 2.4 Materiality and Meaning-making

### 2.4.1 Making Meaning in a Material World

In her recent book *Writing Machines* Katherine Hayles notes that “we have little hope of forging a robust and nuanced account of how literature is changing under the impact of information technologies” without a theory that includes the materiality of texts (Hayles, 2002: 19). Key to developing this ‘nuanced account’ is the relationship between materiality and meaning-making. As I noted earlier, one of the reasons for turning to the Bakhtin Circle was that they provide a critical account of the relationship between the materiality and the aesthetics of works of art. This awareness of materiality is not surprising given their familiarity with the Marxist/Social Realist ideology that became dominant in the Soviet Union. This ideology maintained that the material economic base of a society was the key to understanding its ideological superstructures<sup>8</sup>.

As critical challengers to the early Russian Formalists, the Bakhtin Circle were also aware of the importance of materiality to that school of thought. Medvedev, therefore, signals the importance of materiality to his thinking by dealing with it at the very beginning of *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. He notes:

"All the products of ideological creation - works of art, scientific works, religious symbols and rites etc. - are material things, part of the practical reality that surrounds man."(Medvedev, 1978: 7)

However, as the Bakhtin Circle developed their own conception of materiality they broke with both the over-determinism of orthodox Marxist thought and the scientific objectivism of the Russian formalists. They did this by recognizing the transformative process involved in social meaning-making. Medvedev noted that the formation of meaning is not “a physical or completely natural presence” (Medvedev, 1978: 8), while Voloshinov argued that the physical object “is converted into a sign” which leaves material reality as it “reflects and refracts another reality” (Voloshinov, 1973:9). Medvedev argued that this point is important in meaning-making because:

"Social intercourse is the medium in which the ideological phenomenon first acquires its specific existence, its ideological meaning, its semiotic nature" (Medvedev, 1978: 8)

Medvedev and Voloshinov both recognize the productive aspects of social meaning-making. Voloshinov continues:-

“Side by side with the natural phenomena, with the equipment of technology, and with articles for consumption, there exists a special world - the world of signs" (Voloshinov, 1973:10)

However, as noted earlier, the Bakhtin Circle’s world of signs is not to be understood as a hermetically-sealed idealised space, but as a contested, social arena situated within space/time and subject to all the cultural forces noted above. This means that all signs are realized by the productive use of materiality within the concrete world,

and that this productiveness is not closed off from the social world, but in a dynamic state of becoming.

#### **2.4.2 Bakhtin: The Relationship between Material and Art**

Bakhtin also considered the issue of materiality and art. In his essay 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art' he took issue with the objectivist approach to the verbal arts (characteristic of the early Russian Formalists period and some of the Structuralists) that aimed to describe poetics purely in terms of phonetic and linguistic materiality. He acknowledged that the objective nature of material made these kinds of study tempting because it was the aspect of poetics most amenable to scientific study. However, he then asserted that it was necessary to challenge "the primacy of the material" in aesthetic discussions (Bakhtin, 1990c: 261) as there was a real danger that such discussion becomes determinist (Bakhtin, 1990c: 262) and lacking in an axiological awareness (Bakhtin, 1990c: 264). The purely material, he argued should, therefore, be categorised as being extra-aesthetic (Bakhtin, 1990c:294).

Bakhtin began his conception of the relationship between the material and the work by using an analogy drawn from the plastic arts. He noted that there is a key distinction between what he terms the physical determinateness of a marble statue, and its aesthetic form which is the aim of the "creator's artistic self-activity" (Bakhtin, 1990c: 265). This point is critical because it means that although the work of art can not exist without its material, it is not to be thought as being identical with



its material. He warns that in solely studying materiality one is not studying the work of art (Bakhtin, 1990c: 295). Bakhtin continues this line of reasoning by noting that:-

"Material aesthetics is incapable of founding the essential difference between the aesthetic body and the external work, between articulation and interconnections within that object and the material articulations and interconnections within the external work, and it displays everywhere a tendency to confound these moments or constituents" (Bakhtin, 1990c: 266)

The fact that a work is fashioned out of marble is, therefore, not on its own salient in any discussion of its aesthetic value. This point is pertinent for this argument as it flags up the dangers of extreme material determinism. For example, the simple fact of a text being mediated by a computer does not make it intrinsically valuable.

### 2.4.3 Materiality and the Practice-based Methodology

Bakhtin does not, however, dismiss issues of materiality from creative practice altogether as he recognized that works of art do not spring fully formed into the world as aesthetic objects. He offered advice to the practitioner, noting that they should to some extent become “a geometer, a physicist, an anatomist, a physiologist, a linguist” (Bakhtin, 1990c:267). He also noted that the practitioner needs to approach their work in this manner so that, in Bakhtin’s words, they “understand its construction completely apart from the aesthetic object” (Bakhtin, 1990c:267). Bakhtin also charged the artist to understand “the technical apparatus of aesthetic execution” (Bakhtin, 1990c:267).

These arguments will form a starting point for the practice-informing methodology of this thesis outlined in Chapter Four. However, these technical tasks are secondary in Bakhtin’s view; the primary task the artist sets herself is “to understand the aesthetic object in its purely artistic distinctiveness” (Bakhtin, 1990c:267). Bakhtin developed this argument by noting that the ultimate aim of the artist in forming an aesthetic object is to overcome its materiality. By this, he meant that the work becomes an aesthetic object by being more than its materiality; that the work of computer-mediated textual art is more than just the screen display, its words and their dictionary meanings. It has an intersubjective purpose. In his discussions he qualifies this rather heroic claim, by noting that:

“This overcoming of the material is purely immanent in character. That is, the artist frees himself from language in its linguistic determinateness not through negation but by way of *perfecting* it *immanently*” (Bakhtin, 1990c: 297)

## 2.5 Materiality and Addressivity

### 2.5.1 Materiality of Printed Utterances

Bakhtin was clearly aware of the effect of materiality on the addressivity of written and printed works of verbal art. For example, in 'Discourse in the Novel' he notes that printing "served to shift and displace" the audience of the chivalric romance (Bakhtin, 1981a:379). However, despite this awareness, Bakhtin constantly re-emphasized that meaning-making was a unique event, and this led him to diminish the effects of mechanical reproduction (see for example the notion of the 'finger print' in Bakhtin, 1986b:106)<sup>9</sup>. As a result of this bias, a number of scholars have taken Bakhtin to task for not treating more fully the issue of materiality in his later work on heteroglossia and the novel. Hirschkop, for example, criticised Bakhtin's arguments by noting that "writing, then print, then the electronic media of the twentieth century, have endowed certain speech acts with a reach and force distinct from others" (Hirschkop, 1999:253). This is important because the intense stratification of the language into speech genres in the modern period was, in part, facilitated through the materiality of print, mainly because the reach and force of printed utterances skewed pre-existing power relationships between different types of discourse. The materiality of print also had an effect on the addressivity of these utterances as well.

As a number of scholars have noted, writing is a remarkable technology, which in Walter J. Ong's words allowed the "separation of the word from the living present" (Ong, 1982: 81). It permitted an event of meaning-making to be formed at

considerable distance in both space and time from the participating author. Similarly it allows the author-participant to pre-form, and then to present as a whole, hugely-complex, extended utterances (which otherwise would have been too large and too complicated for an unaided human to articulate and comprehend with any ease – see Ong, 1982:8). The scale and complexity of printed utterances also produced a separation between simple oral utterances on the one hand and complex printed utterances on the other, which Bakhtin recognized in the split between primary and secondary speech genres.

With the rise of print culture, the participants in the utterance were further separated from each other by a technological culture that facilitated the reproduction and dissemination of texts on a grand scale. In this culture, access to print technology was restricted and embedded in what Sven Birkerts has called the "stable hierarchies of the printed page" (Birkerts, 1994:3). As a result the author-participant of a printed utterance possessed (and was possessed by) considerable cultural authority, which further added to the skewing effect produced by print. In this culture, Bolter notes that "the author became a monumental figure" and "the reader only a visitor in the author's cathedral" (Bolter, 2001:4). The authority of the printed text, and the hierarchical system that underlay it, had in turn the effect of 'naturalizing' print within the national culture of print, to the extent that it became almost invisible to the theoretical gaze (see Aarseth, 1997:15 and Hayles, 2002:33).

This state of invisibility has changed of late, and as George P. Landow notes:-

“We find ourselves, for the first time in centuries, able to see the book as unnatural, as a near-miraculous technological innovation, and not as something intrinsically and inevitably human”(Landow, 1997:25).

As a result, a number of commentators have sought to provide characterisations of printed texts. Book-mediated texts have been described as bounded (Ryan, 2001:201), durable (Stallabrass, 2003:14), fixed (Bolter, 2001:4) finite (Drucker, 2004:257) and finished (Ong, 1982:131); possessing what the novelist Vladimir Nabokov described as the “marble finality of an immaculate typescript” (Nabokov, 2000:14). Of course, as Stanley Fish pointed out, the stability and completeness of a book is, of course illusory (Fish, 1980:82). Similarly, as most librarians know only too well, books are fragile. However, these cultural characterisations reflect the effect that the addressivity of these print-based utterances has had on print culture.

### **2.5.2 The Addressivity of Print Culture: From Participant to ‘Mere’ Consumer**

To recap 2.2 above, the Bakhtin Circle described meaning-making as a participative event defined by the addressivity of its utterance. They further postulated that the utterance should be answerable. Dialogic communication, therefore, requires the participation of more than one participant and reciprocity between them. Critically Bakhtin conceptualized a dynamic sense of reciprocity in his concept of addressivity. However, he did not take account of the effect that the materiality of print had on this participation and the essential give-and-take of address. By turning and addressing vast audiences, spread over time and space, in the form of long, complex, socially-lauded printed texts the participants lost some of the immediacy, flexibility and

reciprocity of a face-to-face conversation (Hirschkop, 1999:253). Furthermore, the change in addressivity of these printed utterances altered their answerability.

Voloshinov struggled with this issue when he suggested that the participant's answer to an utterance should be of the same kind. A lengthy, printed text, such as a novel, he suggested, would require a lengthy, printed answer (Voloshinov, 1973: 95).

Indeed, there are some examples of novelists who have done this. For instance, Peter Carey's novel *Jack Maggs* answers back to *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens (Carey, 1997 and Dickens, 1987). By and large, however, Voloshinov's suggestion presents a rather idealized conception of social conditions of meaning-making in print culture because, as noted above, access to print technology was simply unavailable to most reader-participants. The sheer reach and force of the printed text also meant that the reader-participant's other non-print answers (their efforts to comprehend a text, their hand-written notes, their subsequent acts) were marginalized. The considerable time needed to formulate an appropriate answer to a long, complicated printed utterance also militated against genuine reciprocity. The growing cultural perception that the book was 'immaculate' and 'complete' further obscured the reader-participant's participation as it suggested that they had no requirement to answer the utterance. In this culture, the reader's humble response to the great cathedrals of printed literature simply appeared to be unnecessary or even heretical. Worst of all, in this culture, reader-participants came to dismiss their own participation in the act of meaning-making as being trivial. As a result they were culturally diminished; they no longer regarded themselves as active participants and came to see themselves as rather abject creatures, which Roland Barthes characterised as a 'mere consumer of codes' (Barthes, 1990:5).

The modulations in addressivity produced by print culture were observed by the Bakhtin Circle. Voloshinov, for example, describes the role of paragraphs in prose as being “something like a vitiated dialogue” (Voloshinov, 1973:111). However, Bakhtin did not take full account of it within his evaluation of heteroglossia and the novel.

### **2.5.3 The Price of Print: Heteroglossia and Participation**

At the beginning of this chapter, it was noted that it was useful to turn to Bakhtin because his work continually recognized the importance of participation in meaning-making. However, it should also be acknowledged that there is something rather paradoxical in Bakhtin’s lifelong wrestle with participation. For if it is true, as Bakhtin points out, that participation is a ubiquitous phenomenon with a long conceptual history, then why does participation need Bakhtin (or this thesis) to champion its cause?

This apparent paradox can, in part, be explained by Bakhtin not having the benefits of historical hindsight, which meant that he was unable to conceptualise fully the distorting effects produced by a national culture of print on modernity. For, as has been observed above, the materiality of print, that facilitated the production of the complex structures of representation required for a cultural awareness of heteroglossia, also undermined the cultural awareness of the reader’s participation in these events of meaning-making.



This is a significant weakness in Bakhtin's aesthetics, because an awareness of heteroglossia is only one facet in the development of a democratic intersubjective consciousness. Elsewhere, Bakhtin had already recognized the importance of ethical imperative of obligative uniqueness; the obligation to try and be a responsible participant in the meaning-making events of one's own life. Returning to Hirschkop's arguments about democracy, it is important to remember that it is invested in participative engagement; in responsible decision-making; in being answerable for decisions; and in the active, reflexive engagement with the conflicting narratives of modernity. Democracy, in this contemporary context is, therefore, predicated on a respect for diversity, but it also requires that its participants are aware of their involvement in its processes.

## 2.6 Beyond Print?

Bakhtin formulated the concept of heteroglossia in order to argue that novelistic discourse, such as that found in the print-based novels of Dostoevsky, offered a considerable contribution in the development of a desirable social consciousness. However, his arguments about the ethical aspects of uniqueness suggest that a culture fostered through the medium of print might also be limited, because print culture witnessed the disengagement of the reader-participants from the rewards and responsibilities of meaning-making. The printed novel, therefore, has had an ambiguous role in the development of democratic intersubjectivity.

The national culture of print is not, of course, the end of the story. Chapter Three, therefore, turns to the computer-mediated textual art, in order to argue that these emerging art works offer contemporary Western cultures the promise of a corrective to the limitations of print, and that this corrective is the basis for a positive evaluation of these texts.

## **Chapter Three – Computer-mediated Textual Art: Materiality, Addressivity and Aesthetics**

### **3.1 Computer-mediated Textual Art: The Context**

#### **3.1.1 Computer-mediated Textual Art: A Tradition of Terms**

One of the first things to strike a writing practitioner seeking to utilise computers in their working practice, is the extraordinary language that the theorists and practitioners of computer-mediated textual art have coined to describe these intriguing works (see Section 1.1 for a list of some of these terms). A number of these terms, such as hypertext, cybertext and new media writing/art, have become widely-used amongst practitioners and they have given rise to literary/aesthetic traditions (hypertext, cybertext and media art aesthetics are discussed in section 3.3 of this chapter). However, despite this wealth of terms (and the intellectual perspectives reflected in these neologisms) none of these terms fully describe the artistic practice under discussion in this thesis.

This thesis, therefore, has a requirement for a series of Bakhtin-inspired terms to describe the object of its enquiry. It has adopted the umbrella term ‘computer-mediated textuality’ to describe all discursive genres currently being mediated by computer. This term is used in the widest possible sense of the word ‘text’; to describe all utterances woven from combinations of sound, animation, moving and still images, icons, alphabetic and other semiotic elements. The neologism ‘computer-mediated textual art’ has then been adopted throughout this thesis to

describe a sub-set of these texts; those texts that were either conceived as, or have come to be taken as, works of art.

The term 'computer-mediated textual art' has been selected to recognize a wide variety of artistic influences. It has been privileged over terms such as 'computer-mediated literature' or 'computer-mediated art' to recognize the diversity of the artistic traditions, drawn from the aural, literary and visual arts, which have influenced my practice. Furthermore, it has been adopted to flag-up the importance of materiality and addressivity in the formation of the aesthetic described by this thesis.

The broad construction of the term 'computer-mediated textual art' has meant that range of works that inform this discussion is large. This chapter, like the last, constructs its argument, therefore, using a methodology drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin; by citing examples selected to support its case, rather than analyzing every example available. Similarly, as noted above, the construction of this term has meant that it covers a great diversity of artistic approaches. There is no single formal feature (beyond their use of the computer) that is common to all of the works discussed in this chapter. Instead, they are presented as a fascinating series of examples. This chapter examines the addressivity of these examples in order to identify an important mode of address exhibited by sections of these texts. It is this mode of address, demonstrated by this much smaller sub-set of a sub-set, which forms the basis of the original aesthetic described in Section 3.4.

### 3.1.2 Computers in Writing Practices: The Lost Histories of Digital Writing

The historical depth of computers in writing practice is something of a surprise to many, including some experienced practitioners of the art. Writing in 1996 Charles O. Hartman, for example, introduced his book on computer poetry by noting that:-

“Talking about computer poetry is almost like talking about  
extraterrestrial intelligence: great speculation, no examples”  
(Hartman, 1996:1).

Leaving aside Hartman’s desire for a rhetorical effect, what his claims draw attention to is a paradox: on the one hand, there is the debate amongst contemporary theorists about the features of these emerging texts; and on the other hand the cultural obscurity of many significant works of art<sup>1</sup>. This marginality has resulted in the fragmented history of this subject, characterised by what Julian Stallabrass calls “regular false dawns and lost histories” (Stallabrass, 2003:114). This fragmentation and obscurity, therefore, makes it necessary to spend a little time recovering the historical trajectory of these speech genres in order to map out the context underlying the practice reported by this thesis.

A number of scholars have begun the task of unearthing the ‘lost’ history of computers in writing practice. Friedrich W. Block, Christiane Heibach and Karin Wenz, for example, have drawn attention to examples of European practice that stretch back over nearly half a century; such as the text generation work of the

Stuttgart circle of pioneers (Max Bense and Theo Lutz) from the late 1950s (Block *et al.*, 2004: 19); the 'cybernetic landscapes' of Aaron Marcus from the late 1960s (Block *et al.*, 2004: 15); and the "Computer and Writer: The Centre Pompidou Experiment" of 1977 (Block *et al.*, 2004: 21). Maria Mencia also notes a long history of writing and computing, by drawing attention to the inclusion of examples of computer poems and texts in the 1968 ICA exhibition 'Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts' (Mencia, 2003: 60).

Similar histories are now being unearthed for early pioneers in other parts of the world. In the US, for example, Mordecai-Mark Mac Low described his father Jackson Mac Low learning FORTRAN in the 1960s to facilitate his deterministic method for generating texts (Mac Low, 1997). In the UK, Donald Mitchie and Rory Johnson noted the long-standing explorations of the computer and the printer by poet and crystallographer Robin Shirley (Mitchie and Johnson, 1984: 156).

In his forthcoming book, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* Chris Funkhouser identifies a number of pioneering practitioners from across the globe working with a variety of computers from the 1960s to the 1990s (Funkhouser, forthcoming)<sup>2</sup>. Funkhouser also identifies a number of 'milestones' that led to the development of contemporary digital practice - for example, the early exploration of printed generative writing, the exploration of graphics and animation and the first explorations of the link - all of which occurred prior to the widespread adoption of the personal computer and the World Wide Web in the 1990s (Funkhouser: forthcoming).

### 3.1.3 Computers in Writing Practices: Image and Animation

Block, Heibach & Wenz and Mencia locate the origins of digital poetry within the traditions of Western twentieth-century experimental writing (Block *et al.*, 2004:19 and Mencia, 2003:41). This tradition explored (amongst other things) the visual aspects of language; for example in Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrams (Rothenberg and Joris, 1995:119), in Concrete Poetry (Williams, 1977 & McCullough, 1989), as well as in contemporary Visual Poetry (Cobbing and Upton, 1998). It is certainly true that these visual interests have flourished in digital practice, as changes in software, printer and screen technologies have facilitated the exploration of the spatial and visual aspects of texts. Jim Rosenberg, for instance, as early as the 1970s used his own word processor program 'metatype' to produce printed versions of his visually structured 'diagram' poems (Rosenberg, 2002).

By the late 1980s the graphical user interface had become a focus of attention. Practitioners engaged with the screen as an interface and explored the artistic potential of the hypertext link. Poet and programmer, Rod Willmot, for example, programmed his own hypertext system, Orpheus, to produce the poem *Everglade*, while William Dickey used Apple HyperCard to produce poems such as 'Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra' (Dickey, 2003). Deena Larsen, Dickey's editor, argues that these early screen-based computer-mediated works continue to be of interest to contemporary writing practitioners because they provide examples of how to use "imagery, sound, and navigational structures" to make meaning (Larsen, 2003).

### 3.1.4 A History of Computer Writing cont.: Fiction, Hypertext and the WWW

Poets were not, however, the only writing practitioners to produce computer-mediated texts. In the mid 1980s, for example, a number of prose writers explored the relationship between narrative and the interface. Carolyn Guertin argues that Judy Malloy was the first writer to produce a true hypertext fiction, when she posted *Uncle Roger* to the Art Com Electronic Network on the WELL in 1986 (Guertin, 1998). Others, such as Robert Coover and George P. Landow (Coover, 1992 & Landow, 1997: 179) give the award to Michael Joyce for producing *Afternoon* using the Storyspace software in 1987 (Joyce, 1987).

*Afternoon* certainly marked a cultural ‘tipping-point’ in the history of computer-mediated textual art, as its publication increased the visibility of this art form in the literary world. This increased visibility was due in part to *Afternoon* being marketed by Eastgate System as a CD-ROM, but was also due to it becoming the subject of considerable discussion amongst theorists interested in narrative, non-linearity and hypertextuality (see for example Aarseth, 1994:65; Bolter, 2001:124; Douglas, 2000:105; Gaggi, 1997:123; Hayles, 2002: 36; Landow, 1997:179; Liestøl, 1994:110; and, Murray, 1997: 58).

In the 1990s, Eastgate Systems published several other works of hypertext fiction, including Stuart Moulthrop’s *Victory Garden* (Moulthrop, 1991) and *Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson (Jackson, 1995). At about the same time, other fiction writers began to explore the potential of the World Wide Web. In 1995, Judy Malloy converted *Uncle Roger* for the Web and included colour and graphics in the text



(Malloy, 2003). Meanwhile in the UK, Geoff Ryman produced *253*. Ryman's work, like William Dickey's, explored both the hypertext link and graphics. The image described as the '253 Journey Planner', for example, is modelled on the London Underground map. It uses the station symbols (marked with station 'names' such as 'Gulf War Syndrome') to provide links to other sections of this text (Ryman, 1996). Loss Pequeño Glazier argues that this combination remains important because "one of the significant strengths of new media writing is to reunite the text with the image" (Glazier, 2002:169). Arguably, the shift from the print- to computer-mediated practice has subsequently brought writing closer together with programming, sound and the moving image too. Rob Bevan and Tim Wright, for example, utilised music and programming, as well as graphics and text, in the grand finale of their fictional Internet 'holiday', *Mount Kristos* (Bevan and Wright, 2001).

The history of 'digital poetry' and 'hypertext fiction', therefore, challenges Robert Coover's assertions regarding the state of practice in 1999 (noted in section 1.1). Firstly, Coover argued that image, animation and sound were recent introductions into practice, whereas these forms had been part of some writers' practice for some considerable time. Secondly, he argued that their introduction marked a return to traditional aesthetics, whereas in the works cited above these features have been explored within a range of non-traditional aesthetics, such as visual poetics, derived from the interests of twentieth century experimental writing<sup>3</sup>.

### **3.1.5 The History of Computer Texts: Cybertext and Network Flexibility**

Julian Stallabrass notes that "without the solace of objects and the sanction of art institutions" the boundaries of art can be very hard to draw (Stallabrass, 2003:9).

This observation holds particular resonance for computer-mediated textual art, as the theorist Espen J. Aarseth included a number of 'non-literary' works in his history of cybertext that extended the bounds of this art form beyond works explored by traditional literary critics.

A cybertext, according to Aarseth, is "a self-changing text", in which the text presented is "controlled by an immanent cybernetic agent" such as a human or a computer (Aarseth, 1994: 71). Aarseth placed a number of traditional non-computer-mediated works, such as the *I Ching*, in this category (Aarseth, 1997:9). However the thrust of his research focused attention on a number of 'cybertextual' computer programs. Many of these programs were designed by computer scientists and hobby programmers, rather than self-identified writers or artists in the traditional sense (see for example: - Aarseth's discussion of Eliza<sup>4</sup> – Aarseth, 1997:11-12 and Tale-spin<sup>5</sup> – Aarseth, 1997:12). However, these programs are important to the history of computer-mediated textual art because they helped foster the artistic exploration of networked computers. Networked 'multi-user' programs were particularly significant because they demonstrated the way in which the materiality of networked computers can be used to facilitate the rapid updating of a text; by different authors and computer agents working together on the same text from physically remote locations (details of the history of these programmes are provided by Aarseth, 1997 and Montfort, 2005:89).

Collaboration and distributed authorship have become significant themes in computer-mediated textual art; challenging Robert Coover's wholly negative assessment of the Internet in contemporary practice ( see section 1.1 above). For example, Douglas Davis' 1996 work 'The World's First Collaborative Sentence'

utilised an input form to allow participants to append their own short textual contributions to an ever-growing text (Davis, 1996). Leonie Winson's 'Dark Lethe' similarly explored the facilities provided by the network to create "a collaborative story environment"(Winson, 1995). 'Noon Quilt', by Teri Hoskins and Sue Thomas, used the access and flexibility afforded by a website to foster a community of writers (Hoskins and Thomas, 1999)<sup>6</sup>.

### **3.1.6 The Histories of Computer Texts: The Widened Perspective**

The multiple histories of computer-mediated textual art described above provide an important insight into some of the artistic and social contexts underlying the wonderfully rich diversity of work and aesthetics produced by contemporary writing practitioners. It also provides a description of the artistic context of the practice reported in this thesis. However, in weaving these histories together, it is important to note that they do not present a sequential narrative in which one mode of practice has replaced interest in others. Instead, each of these histories can best be described as the narrative of a discursive or speech genre that has been, and continues to be, in a complex series of dialogues with many influences, including the other closely-related discursive genres described above. For although the capabilities of computer hardware and software have changed dramatically over the last forty years; and access to, and expertise in operating computers have dramatically increased the numbers of practitioners working in this area, many of the artistic issues first investigated over forty years ago still remain of interest to a number of contemporary practitioners. The opportunities presented by networked computers, for instance, have not precluded further exploration of generative programs. Talan Memmott, for

example, utilised a generative program to generate both the 'biography' and the 'portrait' in his Internet-based work *Self Portrait(s) [as other(s)]* (Memmott, 2002).

The historical approach to computer-mediated textual art, therefore, provides a useful starting point for critiquing some of the more narrowly-construed aesthetic perspectives of these works, such as the aesthetic of literary hypertext described by Robert Coover. However, before pursuing this critique further it is necessary to re-introduce the Bakhtinian conception of meaning-making developed in Chapter Two. The concepts of materiality and addressivity, in particular, are explored further, in order to provide:-

1. An analytical basis for critiquing the established literary perspective of these texts; and
2. An analytical basis for the new aesthetic understanding of computer-mediated textual art.

## **3.2 The Materiality and Addressivity of Computer-mediated Textual Art**

### **3.2.1 Materiality of Computers: Amenable to Manipulation**

Loss Pequeño Glazier, E-poet and Director of the Electronic Poetry Center at the State University of New York, asserted recently that “materiality is key to understanding innovative practice” (Glazier, 2004:65). In testing this assertion, this section applies the Bakhtin Circle’s conceptions of materiality and addressivity, introduced in Chapter Two, to computer-mediated textual art. It does this in order to discuss further the relationship between these two key Bakhtinian terms; to challenge the primacy of materiality in this discussion; and then, to provide a conceptual framework with which to evaluate the broadened historical context (described above) and the aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art discussed later in this chapter.

However, whilst challenging the primacy of the material in aesthetic discussions, this argument still recognizes the importance of materiality to the Bakhtinian concept of addressivity. This thesis, therefore, follows the ‘being digital’ argument made familiar by Nicholas Negroponte (Negroponte, 1995) and Richard Wise (Wise, 2000) by arguing that these most significant material features of computer-mediated textual art arise from the fact that they are digitised, and that this digitisation makes them highly “amenable to manipulation by a computer” (Wise, 2000: 2). In particular, the fact that the materiality of contemporary networked computers make it possible to structure (and continually restructure) screen-based, computer-mediated textual art works (comprising of text, animation, sound and image) in a number of ways that

would be extremely complex, time-consuming or disproportionately expensive to achieve using traditional print technologies within a print-based culture.

It is possible, therefore, to produce work in which:-

1. *The order of the textual elements presented by the work can be changed:* in response to the direct or indirect actions of the reader-participant; in response to the direct or indirect actions of another participant (author-participant, fellow reader-participant); in response to a pre-programmed element; or in response to some other contextual element (such as the time, the date or an aleatorically-controlled procedure).

2. *The actual elements comprising the work can be changed:* as a result of an additional contribution or deletion being made available by the original author-participant; as a result of a contribution being made by the reader-participant; as a result of a contribution being made by another participant; or in response to a contribution from some other element (such as an RSS or market feed, a chatterbot program or some random element).

These contributions can take many forms such as text, image, music, animation or a link; the key is that the contributions are translated into a digital form so that they can be manipulated with ease by a computer.

This facility of networked computers to structure changes in a digital text in real-time over great distances has meant that, in contrast to the 'marbled finality of print'

described in 2.5.1, computer-mediated textuality has come to be characterised within contemporary culture as being changeable (Hayles, 1999:26), ephemeral (Holtzman, 1997: 128 & Truss, 2003:181), ethereal (Holtzman, 1997:128), evanescent (Birkerts, 1994: 122), fleeting (Spender, 1995:14), flexible (Bolter, 2001:3), fluid (Guertin, 1998), kaleidoscopic (Ryan, 2001:214), multiple (Glazier, 2004:67), plastic (Lanham, 1993:xi), provisional (Birkerts, 1994: 157), transient (Stallabrass, 2003:14), vibrant (Glazier, 2004:67) and volatile (Lanham, 1993:x).

It is tempting, therefore, to attribute the differences in the aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art solely to the differences in their materiality. However, it is worth recalling at this stage Bakhtin's challenge to 'the primacy of the material' in aesthetic discussions noted in section 2.4.2 (Bakhtin, 1990c:261) in order to avoid leaping to an over-determinist conclusion.

The ability to restructure a text is not an exclusive feature of digital computers. In 1945 Vannevar Bush, for example, described a proto-hypertext reader he called 'memex' that was envisaged as a mechanical system (Bush, 2003:37). Similarly, until very recently, texts dealing with UK taxation law were produced in loose-leaf, ring-bound printed form. In the event of a change to the law, the reader-participant of these texts received an updated page from the publishers through the post with instructions about which pages to add, amend or remove from their ring-binder.

Similarly, a number of commentators have noted that printed texts can support a hypertextual reading (Bolter, 2001:100; Hayles, 2002:26; Landow, 1997: 4; Snyder, 1996:16; and Wittig, 2001). Furthermore, Marie-Laure Ryan argued that many of the

texts made available on the World Wide Web are simply “standard linear texts” (Ryan, 2001:205).

The mere fact that a computer mediates a particular text, therefore, does not provide a full account of the aesthetic work. However, the speed of response, the economic viability, the structured flexibility, the extension of the means of production and the global reach of the network which arise out of their digital character mean that the materiality of these works has facilitated the fluidity in the address of some of these texts. It has also fostered a cultural characterisation that embraces the notion of ‘fluidity’. It is this modulation in addressivity that forms the basis of the original aesthetic discussed in Section 3.4.

### **3.2.2 Addressivity of Computer-mediated texts: Access and Reciprocity**

In Chapter Two, it was noted that Bakhtin defined addressivity as “the quality of turning to someone” (Bakhtin, 1986b:99) and that it is this act of turning (and of being turned to) that established the participants in a particular act of meaning-making. From this definition it was argued (following Hirschkop’s historical modification of Bakhtin’s original concept) that the addressivity of a printed utterance was different from that of a face-to-face utterance, primarily because the national culture of print had endowed printed utterances with a reach and force that made them distinct from other utterances. They appeared to this print culture to be authoritative and complete. The increase in reach and force had, in turn, had an effect on their reciprocity that altered the cultural perception of participation in meaning-



making; elevating the status of the author-participant and marginalising the role of the reader-participant in the event of meaning-making.

It was further argued that the significant changes in addressivity of a printed utterance were shaped by:-

1. Access to the means of production;
2. Restrictions placed on reciprocity by the materiality of printed utterances; and
3. The valorisation of complex, printed, secondary speech genres over primary speech genres.

In this section, Hirschkop's historical conceptions are applied to the addressivity of computer-mediated textual art: to explore how the addressivity of these texts has altered them from the norms of print culture; and, to conceptualise an aesthetic for a practice producing computer-mediated textual art. This analysis looks firstly at the wider set of computer-mediated texts (i.e. both artistic and non-artistic computer-mediated texts), noting how they challenge items 1 & 2 above; before focussing on the specific issues raised by a number of key works of computer-mediated textual art.

### *1. Access to the Means of Production*

One of the many changes engendered by the diffusion of networked computers within contemporary society has been to create the perception of increased access to the means of production of texts. For example, according to figures released in 2003, there were 19.4 million live domain names on the World Wide Web presenting more

than 6 billion pages of text. The Internet also supported 65,000 newsgroups, 80,000-plus Internet Relay Chat rooms and more than 1 million communities with message boards (Cyveillance, 2003). There has been, therefore, a perceived increase in the number and types of author-participants with utterances in the wider public domain.

The huge disparity between the roles of the author-participant and the reader-participant associated with print culture is, therefore, being challenged in certain social contexts by the introduction of network computers. Chris Joseph, for example, argued that:

“Collaborative networks, self-publishing and the increasing ease of worldwide distribution have helped reverse traditional producer-consumer roles” (Joseph, 2003)

However, it is important to note that, at the time of writing, this situation is far from being a global condition; for as Tim Jordan noted in 1999, access to electricity, a computer and the internet is still restricted to “a small, privileged sector of developed societies” (Jordan, 1999: 89). Similarly, this is not a homogeneous condition, even amongst societies with access to the Internet. The sociologist Marcus Leaning, for example, noted recently that:

“The political power of the Internet, believed to be an implicit aspect of the technology, is only realised in particular social environments.”  
(Leaning, 2004:22)

Equally, this is not an idealised situation, free from the social stratification noted in Chapter Two. Researchers studying multi-user programs, for example, raised a number of issues that challenge the prevailing notion that the materiality of the Internet provides unlimited opportunities for expression free from cultural constraint. In fact, far from being egalitarian, these researchers characterised these key computer-mediated texts as ‘technocracies’ governed by ‘wizards’ (Aarseth, 1997:158). In one study, for example, Elizabeth Reid highlighted the importance of access to the server and database (and so the control of the means of production) in the formation of the social rules in governing the utterances permitted by the participants (Reid, 1994).

However, while recognising these reservations, it is clear that the cultures emerging out of the use of networked computing have an increased awareness that reader-participants can gain access to the means of production. This change is challenging the conventions of the national culture of print; in particular, cultural notions of authorship, of the work, of publication, and of the role of editorship. Rachel Greene, for example, argues that the successive versions of *World of Awe* made available by Yael Kanarek from 1995 to present-day demonstrate that the conception of ‘one-time’ publishing has changed (Greene, 2004:106-7). Greene also argues that the multiple versions of *My Boyfriend Came Back From the War* provided by Olia Lialina on her website challenge the conventional notion of the ‘marbled finality’ of the definitive text (see Lialina, 1996- ). Similarly, the conservative critic Lynne Truss laments that much of the material available through the Internet is unedited (Truss, 2003:181).

## *2. Authorship and Reciprocity*

Important changes in the reciprocity of texts have occurred at two key levels; as an extra-utterance event; and as an intra-utterance event (discussed in the next section). The changes of address of the extra-utterance event are attested to by cultural phenomena as diverse as ‘add a review’ links on e-commerce sites such as amazon.com; community bulletin boards; forums; listserv<sup>7</sup>; IRC (Internet Relay Chat)<sup>8</sup>, personal home pages; ‘reply to the author’ links on web pages; personal and community blogs<sup>9</sup> and wikis<sup>10</sup>, all of which challenge the cultural norms of the national culture of print. The author-participants of all of these phenomena use opportunities facilitated by the materiality of networked computers (discussed in 3.2.1) to address their reader-participants as potential author-participants. By doing so they foster some sense of reciprocity with them; by drawing the reader-participant’s attention (via a link or a button) to an opportunity to reply (in kind and in a timely fashion) to the original utterance; by providing some kind of limited access to the means of production; and, by genuinely engaging in dialogic interaction with these reader-participants.

### **3.2.3 The Addressivity of Computer-mediated Textual Art: Re-engaging with the Cathedral**

In addition to the changes noted in the last section, the addressivity of a number of works of contemporary computer-mediated textual art further challenge the norms established by print culture. These challenges arise out of the deliberate deployment

of the facility of digital computers to modify the structure and/or the appearance of the digital text whilst it is being interpreted. In contrast to the perceived finality of printed texts in print culture, these texts perceptively change before the senses of their reader-participants and so strike the reader-participant as fluid and unfinished. In many cases, this fluidity is produced by the interaction of the reader-participant and the work of art. The changes that are initiated by the reader-participant are particularly significant, because, far from denigrating their participation in the act of meaning-making, the author-participants of this sub-set of texts address the reader-participant in a manner that draws their attention to the fact that the event of meaning-making is dependent upon their participation. This thesis argues that it is this experience of this mode of address that has encouraged advocates such as Steven Holtzman, Nandy Millan and Jan Van Looy and Jan Baetens to praise the ‘participative’ qualities of computer-mediated textual art (Holtzman, 1997:128; Millan, 2001; and Van Looy and Baetens, 2003:7).

Aspects of this mode of address has been characterised by Mark Stephen Meadows as ‘Pause and Effect’ (see Meadows, 2003). In the Meadow’s model, an input element (such as a link, a button, a mouse-over element, a control, a form, the drag and click or rollover functionality of the Graphical User Interface or another input source) is utilised, in conjunction with some kind of perceptible change or interruption in flow of the text, to address the reader-participant in a manner that suggests that they need to take some kind of decisive action in order to advance their reading. In ‘redridinghood’ by Donna Leishman, for example, the text pauses at a key point, with the main protagonist portrayed asleep in the middle of the screen. The reader is then presented with two textual buttons that read – “Shall Red Dream?

- Wake Her up?”(Leishman, 2000). The text will continue to pause or loop indefinitely, until the reader-participant makes their choice, they close the text or the computer crashes.

However, the pause (as described by Meadows) is not the only way to affect this kind of address. Nick Montfort, for example, noted that in the 1987 Interactive Fiction *Border Zone*, the time-line within the story continued to elapse, even while the reader-participant is thinking about their next move, and in doing so also draws their attention to the need to make timely decisions while participating in this piece (Montfort, 2005:165).

This thesis argues that the address of these utterances is significant for meaning-making within print culture as discussed. In particular, it is valuable because:-

1. It draws attention to the participative actions of the reader-participant during a reading;
2. It fosters a sense of reciprocity within the utterance;
3. It challenges the trivialisation within the print culture of the role of the reader-participant in the act of meaning-making.

These claims for the addressivity of these utterances can be best understood by exploring a number of examples of computer-mediated textual art that address their reader-participant as self-aware participants in the event of meaning-making.

### 1. *The Artistic Use of the Link*

Arguably, the most familiar method for changing the order of elements presented in a digital text is the link. This mode of address is often used to suggest to the reader-participant that they need to make a choice as to which piece of the text will be displayed next.

This suggestion of a choice can be used to great artistic effect. For example, in *Patchwork Girl*, the author-participant Shelley Jackson uses the dash key to create a graphical ‘stitching-effect’ link at the bottom of a group of lexia that deal with the theme of stitching:-

(“—————”

(Jackson, 1995:[scrap bag])).

This line of dashes is, however, more than just a mere decoration because it also serves to demonstrate the ideas being discussed by this passage. The default link for this lexia (selected by pressing the return key) brings up the next ‘seamed’ lexia. However, in contrast, by finding and then choosing the hidden ‘stitching’ link the reader-participant is presented with an alternative ‘stitched’ lexia.

This link, with its visual and verbal associations, is significant to this work, therefore, because it draws the attention of the reader-participant to

their participation in what is occurring. It suggests to them that they are responsible for stitching this particular text together. It is also important for Jackson's work overall, as it draws attention to the metaphorical themes of patchworks and sewing explored by this work, whilst also serving as a demonstration of the reader-participants' involvement in this constructivist theme. Furthermore, it adds to the semiotic complexity of the text presented by requiring the reader to switch their attention from the visual to semantic sign-system (and back again) realised in this piece of text.

## *2. The Artistic Use of Buttons*

Another familiar, and rather similar, feature for changing the order of elements presented in a digital text is the button. Like the link, this feature presents the reader-participant with a choice that needs to be addressed. In many cases, this choice amounts to little more than a choice between agreeing (or disagreeing) with a simple statement. The computer industry, for example, often requires a reader-participant to click on an OK button before installing a piece of software, to mark the reader-participants' acceptance of the terms and conditions of the software licence. However, the two versions of 'OK Texts' provided by Mark Amerika, demonstrate that the same effect in a different context can alter the address of a text to great artistic effect.



In the html version of 'OK Texts', the reader-participant is presented with a page that comprises of a series of questions followed by the statement 'OK'. In this version, it is possible to read all the way to the end of the text without pause. For example:-

"Multi-national corporations create user-friendly software so that you will always depend on their lens to the world. More co-dependency?

OK

We cannot process your information. Your information is corrupt and needs cleansing. Erase brain?

OK"

(Amerika, 1999a)

In contrast, the button-based version of this text pauses after each question (see Amerika, 1999b). It asks the reader-participants to 'OK' the statements made by clicking an OK button before proceeding to the next statement. By addressing the reader-participant in this way, it draws attention to their role in this agreement. It also engenders a sense of reciprocity within the utterance by converting a rhetorical question into a dialogic question; with the implication that the reader-participant is required to make a response and that they are, therefore, answerable in some way for that answer.

### *3. The Artistic Use of Controls*

Clicking a link or pressing on a button is not the only way that a reader-participant can be asked to select the elements of a text. A number of contemporary practitioners, for instance, have designed thought-provoking animated interfaces that use complex, visual metaphors to make meaning. Jim Andrews' 'Arteroid' (a work which deals with "cracking language open"), has, for example, an interface modelled on the popular computer game, Asteroids (Andrews, 2003). The reader-participant participates in the determination of the text to be displayed by manipulating the 'fire' and 'manoeuvre' controls in the manner of the game. In doing so, they are made aware of their participation in the artistic processes under discussion in Andrews' work.

### *4. The Artistic Use of Forms*

It was noted in section 3.2.1 above, that network computers can facilitate the addition of elements to a text. It is possible, therefore, to address the reader-participant of these texts as a contributor. This mode of address has been used to great artistic effect within a number of works of contemporary computer-mediated textual art. In 'Swarm' (a work that deals with the philosophical issues of hive-mind and memory) the reader-participant can place their own small segments of text alongside words produced by other reader-participants (see Prophet, 1997).

The address of this section of text is extremely effective in the context of this work, as the reader-participant is provided with a direct experience of the concept of hive-mind being discussed by this piece.

### *5. The Artistic Use of Click and Drag*

The 'click and drag' functionality of the Graphical User Interface has also been used as a way of modifying what is seen on the screen. For example, in 'The Virtual Disappearance of Miriam' by Martyn Bedford and Andy Campbell, the section titled 'missing you already' has text displayed on one half of an image shaped like a double bed (Bedford and Campbell, 2000). In its default mode, this text runs out of the field of view so that most of it can not be read by the reader-participant. However by clicking and dragging the 'bed' image, the unreadable parts of this text can be manipulated into view.

The addressivity of this section does more than just simply draw attention to the reader-participant's involvement in the act of dragging, however. It also serves to develop one of the major themes of 'The Virtual Disappearance of Miriam', namely, that the story of Miriam will only be brought into view with the active participation of its reader-participant. In this respect, the participatory address of this movable bed functions in much the same way as clicking on the 'stitching' in *Patchwork Girl* in that its address both illustrates and demonstrates a key point about its text.

### 6. *The artistic use of rollover effects*

Sally Pryor argues that rollover effects also have “powerful communicational potential” (Pryor, 2003: 50). In her work she uses rollovers to create ‘dynamic signs’ that are “various combinations of written, pictorial and auditory signs” (Pryor, 2003: 50). In her recent work, *Postcards from Writing*, for example, Pryor uses these effects to encourage the reader-participant to question their assumptions about writing. For instance, in the ‘postcard’ that discusses Pryor’s own awakening to writing in Tunis, rolling over the symbol for the Carthagenean goddess Tanit (positioned in the bottom left hand corner of the screen) triggers the playing of a recording of Pryor asking “Is this picture writing?” (Pryor, 2004). However, after following a link from this symbol to the next ‘postcard’ the same voice recording is played when rolling-over the alphabetic text ‘picture writing?’. This roll-over is effective, therefore, because it addresses the reader-participant with an ambiguity that they need to investigate in order to engage with the issues raised by this piece.

### 7. *The artistic use of presence*

Most of the examples described in this chapter have been drawn from works distributed by the Internet. This is because these works provide good examples of the changes of addressivity under discussion in this section. However, they do not describe all of the modes of address available to the author-participant. For example, a number of practitioners of computer-mediated textual art have designed work that

uses 'non-standard' sensors to draw attention to the physical presence of reader-participant within the work. For example, 'This is not a Hypertext', by Simon Biggs, grows in length and alters its font size by analysing the physical actions of its audience (Biggs, 2003).

This work produces a single sentence that grows word by word, over the course of the reading. However, when a movement is detected by the program (such as when a member of the audience gets up to leave) it suspends the production of the sentence until the movement has stopped. This piece addresses the reader-participant as a physical presence; as a member of a physical audience. It is successful, therefore, in drawing the reader-participants' attention to their physical position (sitting/standing stationary) within the work of art, as well as, drawing attention to the presence of the other reader-participants in the reading as well.

The examples of addressivity, described above, are significant because they provide examples of work that are markedly different from the norms of the national culture of print described in Chapter Two. In particular, they utilise modes of address that draw the reader-participant's attention to their participation during the course of a reading. These differences in address are, therefore, highly significant (within the cultural conditions noted in Chapter Two) because they re-foster an awareness of participation in meaning-making and a sense of reciprocity, long obscured by print culture.

With these texts, the reader-participant has a renewed sense of being addressed uniquely by the utterance (and with it an awareness of their responsibility to participate fully in the event of meaning-making taking place). This awareness of

reciprocity is important, firstly, because these modes of address draw attention to the fact that the judgements and actions of the reader-participant are a required part of this act of meaning-making; but secondly, because it provides a renewed sense of participation within meaning-making in the world beyond this text. As Maria Mencia observes, this renewed awareness of participation with the act of meaning-making “furthers the work outside the work” (Mencia, 2003:49).

This sense of reciprocity also serves to redress the imbalance between print culture evaluations of complex, printed utterances and other more simple utterances. In the works discussed above, the work was realised through the dialogic interactions of the complex utterance created by the author-participant and the simpler, but significant, responses provided by the reader-participant. The explicit recognition of the importance of the contributions made by both the reader- and the author-participant in these utterances challenge the trivialisation of the role of the reader-participant to the act of meaning-making in print culture.

#### 3.2.4 Agency or Awareness?

At first sight the awareness of participation and reciprocity shares a number of conceptual features with the notion of agency, described by Janet. H. Murray in *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. In this influential text, Murray defines agency as the:-

“Power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices” (Murray, 1997:126)

For Murray, agency is of great importance for understanding the aesthetics of these texts because they provide the interactor with:-

“the thrill of exerting power over enticing and plastic materials.”

(Murray, 1997: 153)

However, in contrast to Murray’s conception, the awareness of participation and reciprocity fostered by the addressivity of these texts does not necessarily stem from mastery or control. In fact, it can often spring from a sense of confusion, of being challenged, or of being lost in a labyrinth (see Gaggi, 1997:122; Aarseth, 1997:91; and Ryan, 2001:183).

It is significant, therefore, in comparing these two concepts, that a number of artists and writers have ‘confessed’ recently to producing works that deliberately subvert Murray’s conception of empowerment (see Pryor, 2003: 67 and Leishman, 2004). In her doctoral thesis, Donna Leishman, for example, observes that:-

“A long-standing tradition dictates that the interface designer creates systems of clarity and coherence, to ultimately evoke rewarding generalised and intuitive responses from the participant. I propose to react against this insistence by subverting the practice of what is commonly called "interface design"” (Leishman, 2004)

The awareness of participation and reciprocity (which may or may not be induced by a specific sense of self-empowerment) in the act of meaning-making, therefore, serve

as the basis of the original aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art described in section 3.4.

However, before providing a full description of the historical context of this aesthetic, the next section describes the aesthetics of hypertext, cybertext and new media art. These well-established aesthetic perspectives are critiqued in order to map out elements of the theoretical controversy established in the introduction of this thesis. They are also critiqued in order to locate the originality and value of the aesthetic described in section 3.4 below.



### 3.3 Existing Aesthetics: Hypertext, Cybertext and New Media Art

#### 3.3.1 Hypertext Aesthetics: Landow

The aesthetic of the ‘literary hypertext’ used by Robert Coover to herald *Patchwork Girl* as the pinnacle of computer-mediated textual art draws its conceptual roots from the ‘hypertext’ literary theories of the late 1980s and 1990s. Many of his ideas are, therefore, held in common with theorists such as George P. Landow, J. Yellowlees Douglas, Michael Joyce and Silvio Gaggi who have written extensively on the subject (see Douglas, 2000; Gaggi, 1997; Joyce, 1995; and Landow 1997). However, despite many similarities in approach, there are, unsurprisingly, a number of fundamental points of disagreement between Coover and the hypertext theorists that complicate any summary of their position. In an effort, therefore, to explicate these complexities, this section turns first to George Landow’s work, as the most extensive and generalised account of hypertext theory, before then moving on to critiquing Coover’s conception of the ‘literary hypertext’.

The original conception of the term ‘hypertext’ was developed by Ted Nelson *circa* 1965 (Nelson, 1993). George P. Landow used this term to define hypertext as “text composed as lexias (blocks of words, moving or static images, or sounds) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains or trails in an open-ended web” (Landow, 2000: 154). From this definition he developed his theory by pointing out that, as a result of the inclusion of these links between the lexia, the small sub-sections of the text can be read in a number of different orders. For example, on the title page of

*Patchwork Girl* the reader is presented with six different links – ‘a graveyard’; ‘a journal’; ‘a quilt’; ‘a story’; ‘broken accents’ and ‘sources’ – to six different lexia each of which will provide a different starting point for a reading (Jackson, 1995:[title page]). Landow characterised this type of reading as being “multisequential” or “multilinear” (Landow, 2000: 154).

Landow argued that the multisequentiality of hypertext was of great importance because it “permits readers to choose their own paths through a set of possibilities” and by doing this it “dissolves the fundamental fixity” of traditional rhetoric made up by the author, the text and the reader (Landow, 1994:33).

Having freed himself of the rhetorical ‘triangle’, Landow turned instead to ‘post-structuralist’ descriptions of meaning-making to conceptualise hypertext. As a result his hypertext aesthetics draws heavily on the works of Roland Barthes (as well as the works of Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin). In his introduction to *Hypertext 2.0*, for example, he noted that the ideal textuality described by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* “precisely matches” hypertext (Landow, 1997:3).

More recently, Landow has returned to the question of hypertext aesthetics by posing the question – “What good things, what desirable qualities, come with linking, since the link is the defining characteristic of hypertext?” (Landow, 2004). He has answered this question by arguing that the aesthetics of hypertext are based on the ability of the link to engender “reader empowerment” and “multivocality” (Landow, 2004). The aesthetics of hypertext are, therefore, best understood by first re-assessing

Roland Barthes' conceptions of reader empowerment, before turning to the causal relationship drawn by Landow between the link and 'hypertext' aesthetics.

The Barthesian ideal of textuality is an open, plural text characterised by a myriad of readings in which the reader is liberated from the control of the 'Author-God' (see, for example, Barthes, 1988:170). From this idea, Barthes developed an aesthetic of reading rooted in the contrast between his conception of the 'readerly' and the 'writerly' text. As Chapter Two noted, the 'readerly' or classic narrative text was held by Barthes to be flawed because the reader is being forced into being a passive consumer of codes, who can either accept or deny the text, and who is being denied access to "the magic of the signifier" (Barthes, 1990:5). The 'writerly' text, by contrast, was heralded by Barthes as the new aesthetic goal of the literary arts. He described it as an open, plural text that provides an endless series of interpretations to the engaged 'writerly' reader. As Barthes notes, "the more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it" (Barthes, 1990: 10). Furthermore, in his in/famous essay 'The Death of the Author' Barthes noted that:

"There is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto thought, the author. "(Barthes, 1995: 129)

In his review of Landow's *Hypertext 2.0*, Adrian Page described Landow's appropriation of the Barthesian conception of the 'writerly' text as the 'hypertext ideal'. In criticising this ideal, Page argued that it was characterised by a reading experience "in which all boundaries evaporate and infinite connections open up" so

that the text was being conceived as “an absolutely unstructured form” that could be processed in innumerable ways” (Page, 1998:88).

Landow’s reliance on Barthes’ notion of the ‘readerly’ text, therefore, presents his analysis of hypertext aesthetics with a number of strengths, as well as some significant problems. By following Barthes, for example, he is able to theorize the multivocality of hypertext reading (Landow, 1997:33). However, this Barthesian-based account of hypertext struggles to account adequately for the role played by the author-participant in the creation of meaning within these texts. This is an important point because with a work such as *Patchwork Girl*, for example, the program does not (on opening at least) present the lexia of the text like a pack of cards that can be shuffled and read in any order. Instead it presents a carefully-crafted opening page which acts as a radial nexus leading to a number of long-looping paths. Similarly, the order of the text presented within the lexia remains fixed. This text is multi-sequential not sequence-free. This is further significant because the existence of these sequences is, by inference at least, dependent upon a participant(s), beyond the reader-participant.

At a pragmatic level, therefore, the concept of the author has had a ‘homecoming’ within hypertext aesthetics. Robert Coover, for example, observed that:-

"The author did not disappear, as was feared or hoped for, but became a kind of designer or architect or landscaper as well as writer, building or laying out a structural or geographical space

through which the reader might roam as though on a quest of her own, guided or not guided by its artist-maker." (Coover, 1999)

As a result of this return, the Barthesian basis of hypertext theory presents its advocates with a number of problems when applying their conceptions of readerly empowerment; in particular when trying to provide an aesthetic account of the sense of disorientation induced either by artistic intention or by 'bad' interface design (see Landow, 1997:115).

The claim of reader empowerment through the use of the link is further challenged by critical readings of works such as Stuart Moulthrop's *Hegirascope* (Moulthrop, 1997). This work uses hypertext links in its structure; however, it also uses a function known as "page refresh" to produce an effect rather like an uninterruptible slide show. Aarseth notes, that despite its links, this work gives the reader very little sense of control; instead it produces a reading experience that is like "rowing against the current in a mighty river" (Aarseth, 1997: 80).

It is significant for this discussion of hypertext aesthetics, therefore, that a number of contemporary literary theorists have convincingly argued against the kind of textuality described by Roland Barthes. Séan Burke, for example, points out that Barthes is actually inventing a construct, the Author-God, and that the "the author in 'The Death of the Author' only seems ready for death precisely because he never existed in the first place" (Burke, 1992:27).

Similarly, there have been a number of criticisms of Landow's valorisation of the link. For, in making the link solely responsible for the aesthetics of these texts, Landow did not discuss the other mechanisms (triggered by a rollover, a refresh command, a click and drag, a control or button, or some other sensor) by which a computer-mediated text can be manipulated by their reader-participant. He similarly ignored the aesthetics of a number of other works of art, such as 'War Room' by Alan Sondheim and Simon Mills that address their reader-participants as contributors (Sondheim and Mills, 2003); suggesting that hypertext aesthetics are narrowly focused.

### **3.3.2 Hypertext Aesthetics: Coover**

Robert Coover's aesthetic of 'literary hypertext' is also based upon the idea that the deployment of links and lexias within a text brings about 'reader empowerment'. In summarizing his critique of traditional texts (such as print-based novels and films), for example, Coover argued that multi-linearity, supported by the hypertext link, is significant because it provided freedom from the "tyranny of the line" (Coover, 1992). His aesthetic, therefore, shares many of the limitations described in Section 3.3.1 above. However, Coover's aesthetics of hypertext differs from Landow's in two significant ways; in his antipathy to the use of multimedia and the Internet in practice, and his emphasis upon the importance of an immersive reading experience.

Coover's valorisation of the multilinear text helps to explain, in part, his objections to the use of multimedia elements within computer-mediated textual art. Coover regards these elements as being repressive because he conceives of them as being

linear. In his 1999 speech, for example, he describes 'media-rich' works, using animation, sound and film as having an "ineluctable flow as directed by the author" (Coover, 1999). However, this causal connection is somewhat historic because a number of projects, such as 'Biological Time Clock' by Millie Niss (Niss, 2003) and 'Oh' by Dan Waber, Jennifer Hill-Kaucher & Reiner Strasser (Waber, Hill-Kaucher & Strasser, 2005), provide the reader-participant with an opportunity to explore multimedia files in a non-linear manner. Furthermore, George P. Landow has argued recently that the relationship between multimedia elements and linearity is not as fixed or as inevitable as Coover's speech suggests. For example, in a recent review of a number of animated computer-mediated works, Landow picks out 'Vniverse' by Stephanie Strickland (Strickland, 2001) for praise, noting that:-

"Like many hypermedia projects that employ Flash and similar software, Vniverse boasts animated text. Unlike many such projects, it also emphasizes a high degree of reader control." (Landow, 2004)

Coover's characterisation of the Internet is also based on a series of assumptions; in particular, that the Internet is an unsuitable medium for "the quiet voice of literature" (Coover, 1999). In his 1999 speech, for example, he asserts that "literature has a shape, and the Net is shapeless" before then going on to argue that "literature is traditionally slow and low-tech and thoughtful, the Net is fast and high-tech and actional" (Coover, 1999). However, although it might be defensible to characterise the Internet and the World Wide Web, in particular, as an un-structured sprawl, many of the individual works of art situated within the Web are highly-structured. Furthermore, as was argued in section 3.1, the Internet is well-suited for supporting

the structuring of works of literature that are arranged in a temporal manner; a form of structuring that is costly to support using either print technology or a stand-alone computer technology.

It is particularly significant that Coover dismissed the Internet because of its 'actional' qualities. This might seem strange in the light of Coover's rather Bakhtinian conception of reading. In his 1999 speech, for example, he describes the reading of a text as "one of the most interactive things we, as humans, do" (Coover, 1999). However, despite rooting his 'literary hypertext' in reader participation, Coover then turns to the conception of an immersive reading for his evaluations. For example, in praising, *Patchwork Girl*, he argued that it offers:-

"an experience of losing oneself to a text, for as one plunges deeper and deeper into one's own personal exploration of the relations here of creator to created and of body to text, one never fails to be rewarded and so is drawn ever deeper, until clicking the mouse is as unconscious an act as turning a page, and much less constraining, more compelling." (Coover, 1999)

This desire for an unconscious act of reading, therefore, produces a solipsistic paradox at the heart of Coover's aesthetic, in that he wishes for readers to be free to explore their reading of the text, while simultaneously being unquestioning and largely unaware of their actions and role in these acts of making meaning.



### 3.3.3 Ergodic Cybertext Aesthetics: Aarseth

In contrast to the narrow perspective described in the aesthetics of literary hypertext noted above, the aesthetics of cybertext described by Espen J. Aarseth in *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* drew on a huge range of computer-mediated texts (Aarseth, 1997:10).

As noted in 3.1.4 above, a cybertext is, according to Aarseth, “a self-changing text”, in which the text presented is “controlled by an immanent cybernetic agent” such as a human or a computer (Aarseth, 1994: 71). Aarseth further developed the specificity of this term by introducing the concept of ‘ergodic literature’. This term ergodic derives from the Greek words *ergo* and *hodos* and means ‘work-path’. It is used by Aarseth to describe cybertextual works, such as an adventure game, in which a “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text” (Aarseth, 1997: 1). He distinguishes these texts from other more conventional texts by arguing that with non-ergodic texts “the effort to traverse the text is trivial” (Aarseth, 1997:1). He expands on this concept of effort, noting that with non-ergodic texts there are:

“no extranoematic responsibilities placed on the reader except ( for example) eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning of pages” (Aarseth, 1997:1).

Ergodic texts are different, he argues, because they impose on their reader a duty to do more than just understand the text. This difference is significant because:-

“The effort and energy demanded by the cybertext of its reader raise the stakes of interpretation to those of intervention.”(Aarseth,1997:4)

Further adding:-

“The cybertext reader is a player, a gambler; the cybertext is a game-world or world-game” (Aarseth, 1997:4)

There is a real danger of being over-reductive in summarizing Aarseth's work. For the most part, his analysis deals with the diversity he identifies using a function-oriented typology rather than an overarching critique; presenting separate transclusions for each of the differing types of cybertext he discusses. Furthermore, Aarseth defended this approach by arguing that “there is no obvious unity of aesthetics” between them (Aarseth, 1997:5). Nevertheless, Katherine Hayles suggests that Aarseth's assessments (located in his introduction and main conclusion) valorise computer games as the “paradigmatic examples of ergodic texts” (Hayles, 2002:28). For example, Aarseth argues that:

“The successful ergodic work of art maintains tension and excitement while providing a path for discovery, a coming into focus is in itself a design principle, a necessity on the part of the user's experience. (Aarseth, 1997:179)

Further noting:-

“the ergodic work of art is one that in a material sense includes the rules for its own use, a work that has certain requirements built in that automatically distinguish between successful and unsuccessful users” (Aarseth, 1997:179)

There are, however, a number of issues that present problems when applying Aarseth’s assessments to the practice of computer-mediated textual art; in particular, his treatment of noematic and extra-noematic effort <sup>11</sup> in his description of ergodic cybertext; the use of a functional typology to describe historic phenomena; and the use of a ludic aesthetic to describe non-game forms.

### *1. The role of noematic and extra-noematic effort*

In his introduction to *Cybertext*, Aarseth draws on reader-response theory and this means that, like Mikhail Bakhtin, he is mindful of the efforts that readers make in the act of reading (Aarseth, 1997:1). As a result, Aarseth focused his descriptions of the ergodic on extra-noematic effort (as he is reluctant to make any special claims for the noematic act of understanding of these texts). Aarseth, therefore, tends to downplay the role played by noematic effort in aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art, even when he identifies an example to the contrary. For example, in the description of reading *Hegirascope* by Stuart Moulthrop, described in section 3.3.1 above, Aarseth identifies that it takes considerable noematic effort (as well as the additional extranoematic effort of moving ones eyeballs at speed) to read the fast-flowing currents of this text.

Similarly, his theory has difficulties in explaining examples of reading in which the extra-noematic effort involved in reading a computer-mediated text is comparable to that of reading a book. In the previous section, it was noted that Robert Coover described a state in which “clicking the mouse is as unconscious an act as turning a page” (Coover, 1999); suggesting that there was very little extra-noematic effort involved in his reading. Likewise, Aarseth’s linking of ‘ergodic’ and ‘cybertext’ together means that he tends to overlook the possibility of a non-cybertextual ergodic reading. It is quite possible, for example, to describe an ergodic reading of a non ‘self-changing’ text (for example – a copy of this thesis) in which a researcher seeking to express their understanding of a particular argument moves physically through a text turning page after page in a deliberate, hypertextual manner; moving (with care) from index to section, from section to bibliography, from bibliography to picking up a secondary reference and back again in a strategic, problem-solving manner. In this case, there would be considerable noematic *and* extra-noematic effort involved in traversing printed texts.

## *2. Functional Typology and Historic Phenomena*

In Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven of *Cybertext*, Aarseth provided a panoramic snapshot of main genres of computer-mediated textual art. However, whilst it is important that he recognized the breadth and diversity of these texts in the mid 1990s, it is equally important to recognize that the aesthetics of these genres are not as stable or discrete as this typology suggests. In Chapter Seven, for example, Aarseth himself described the role and functions of Julia, a generative, chatterbot

program similar to ELIZA, in the course of his description of the Multi-user program *TinyMUD Classic*<sup>12</sup> (Aarseth, 1997:154). Similarly, in his earlier discussions of the use of conditional links in Michael Joyce's *Afternoon*, Aarseth observed a deliberate artistic blurring of categories; describing this work as "a cybertext disguised in hypertext clothing" (Aarseth, 1994:65) In fact, as was noted in 3.1 above, a number of contemporary practitioners have drawn influences from a number of the categories of work described by Aarseth. It is, therefore, important to recognize that the once-separate aesthetics described by Aarseth are being (as good exemplars of Bakhtinian becoming) combined and compared in contemporary practice.

Any subsequent theoretical description of the aesthetics of these texts needs, therefore, to take the historic and cultural context into account in its descriptions.

### *3. The Ludic Aesthetic of Computer-mediated Textual Art*

Aarseth asserts early in his argument that a cybertext reader is a "game-player" (Aarseth, 1997:4). However, having made this statement he is then faced with a lot of devil in his detail. In his discussion of the tropes of aporia and epiphany, for example, he focuses his arguments on a particular reading experience, drawn from his fascinating encounter with Michael Joyce's *Afternoon*. In this reading he notes that "the hypertext aporia prevents us from making sense of the whole because we may not have access to a particular part" (Aarseth, 1997: 91). As a result of this aporia, the reader, he argues, experiences the joy of a hypertext epiphany; "an unexpected salvaging effect: the link out" (Aarseth, 1997:91). It is certainly true that these tropes are very closely related to the joys of games and puzzle-solving.

However, they are neither typical, nor indeed the only tropes used in hypertext literature. There is, for instance, very little of this kind of game-playing in a reading of *Patchwork Girl*.

Aarseth's ludic aesthetic runs into deeper trouble in his later discussions of tinyMUD. Here he is forced to recognize that it was not a game at all because it has "no immanent rules to regulate social and linguistic behaviour" (Aarseth, 1997: 145). The examples of my own practice provided with this thesis, similarly, do not exhibit clearly defined 'immanent rules'. They are not designed to be played as games and develop their aesthetic interest from the effect of address on their reader-participant, rather than from the strictures of a ludic challenge.

### **3.3.4 Other Aesthetics: Media Art etc.**

Although the hypertext and cybertext perspectives are, at present, the most influential literary theoretical approaches, they are not the only aesthetic accounts of computer-mediated textual art. For, in addition to these formalized perspectives, there are also a number of artistic 'tendencies' that inform the aesthetics of contemporary practitioners. Simon Mills, for example, has noted that: -

"There is a tendency amongst much contemporary new media art to be caught up in reflecting upon the conditions of its own existence"  
(Mills, 2004).

Mills cites works that focus on data mapping, network visualisation and generative algorithms as examples of this artistic practice. Benjamin Fry's work 'Anemone', for example, explored the mutability of the Internet by mapping usage data from a website on the screen. (Fry, 1999).

In her pamphlet *Writing Machines*, N. Katherine Hayles developed this concept in a specifically literary context. She described what she calls a technotext; that is a literary work that "interrogates the inscription technology that produces it" (Hayles, 2002:25). Hayles gives the example of *Lexia to Perplexia* by Talan Memmott as a paradigmatic example of a computer-mediated 'technotext'.

In many respects, this focusing on the mediation of the work is laudable because it has drawn attention to the 'invisibility' of printed text in critical thinking (noted in Chapter Two). It has also drawn attention to the role played by a medium in meaning-making. It has, therefore, allowed practitioners to reconceive their artistic practices. Unfortunately, it can also, when taken to extreme, become a somewhat self-regarding aesthetic. In revisiting the distinction made by Mikhail Bakhtin between the material and the aesthetic work, it is possible to see how this approach tends to conflate the two. In particular, in focussing aesthetic judgments solely on the exploration of the inscription technology there has been a tendency to apply Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism, 'the medium is the message', rather too literally (McLuhan, 1964:7) so that the aesthetic discussions of these works focus their attention on their mediation at the expense of all the other constituents identified by the Bakhtin Circle (the participants; the address; the historic context and inter-subjective consciousnesses) that make up the utterances involved.

### **3.4 A New Aesthetic of Computer-mediated Textual Art: Awareness, Uniqueness and the Historical Moment**

#### **3.4.1 A Grounded, Social Aesthetic**

In Chapter Two it was noted that the Bakhtin Circle described meaning-making as a socially and historically contingent activity. Furthermore, it noted that Bakhtin argued that value could only be assessed in a particular context (Bakhtin, 1993:36). In following Bakhtin, therefore, this thesis argues that it is only possible to provide an aesthetic evaluation of computer-mediated textual art for a particularised historical and cultural moment. It rejects, therefore, the concept of an idealised or universal aesthetic, and instead seeks to describe value in contingent and localised terms. Furthermore, in following Bakhtin's notion of the 'aesthetic work' explored in Section 3.2, it rejects technological determinacy; namely the idea that any value identified in this context arises directly from the materiality of these texts or that there is, therefore, an intrinsic quality possessed by all computer-mediated textual art that would benefit all readers. Instead, it will argue that their value lies within the social sphere; in the possibilities for a change in intersubjective consciousness provided by the addressivity of some of these works within contemporary Western cultures(s).

The final section of this chapter, therefore, grounds its description of the new aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art by following the lead provided by Bakhtin and Hirschkop; using a historical approach to position this aesthetic within the



inheritance derived from the national culture of print. However in doing so, this thesis also acknowledges explicitly the limitations placed on this kind of theoretical methodology by Bakhtin.

For, in embracing the uniqueness of every event of meaning-making and the role of reader-participant within this event, Bakhtin recognized that it is simply not possible to specify, in theoretical terms alone, all of the conditions making up the context of an individual reading experience. The historical and theoretical descriptions of this aesthetic provided by this chapter, therefore, can only hope to argue for the value of these texts in general cultural terms which are not specific to the individual reader. Furthermore, it is necessary, following Bakhtin, that the reader-participant engages directly with a text to have a full aesthetic appreciation of these works (Bakhtin, 1993:10). The examples of practice discussed in this and the next chapters provide an opportunity to engage directly with the aesthetic described by this thesis.

### **3.4.2 An Aesthetic of Computer-mediated Textual Art: A Historical and Cultural Approach**

There is considerable disagreement amongst scholars about the continuing role played by the national culture of print within contemporary Western culture. Richard Lanham, for example, argued that “the long reign of black and white textual truth has ended”(Lanham, 1993: x). In contrast, Kathleen Welch argued that “print rules....that is to say, print on paper rules” (Welch, 1999:108). Jay David Bolter took a less didactic approach in arguing that we are living in the “last age of print” (Bolter, 2001: 2) in which “the printed book is no longer the only or necessarily the most

important space in which we locate our texts and images." (Bolter, 2001: 210).

However, whilst making bold claims for post-book technology, Bolter also recognized the continuing hegemony of the national culture of print, noting that it continues to find support through a number of important systemic elements such as Intellectual Property Rights (see Bolter, 2001:210-211 and Herrington, 2001:123).

This particular debate, about the relationship between print culture and digital computers, constitutes part of a much broader debate about the changing role of print within twentieth-century Western culture. Many cultural theorists, following the lead provided by Marshall McLuhan, Walter J. Ong and Raymond Williams, have presented arguments about the impact of film, radio and television, on the hegemony of print culture (McLuhan, 1962; Ong, 1982; and Williams, 1975). Similarly, the cultural norms derived from the national culture of print have not gone unchallenged by literary theorists either. In fact, there has been a long-standing trend in literary studies to increasingly marginalise the romantic conception of the author as an autonomous creator (Burke, 1995: 215). However, whilst recognizing that a number of significant changes have occurred in cultural construction of communication during the twentieth century, it is also important to note a significant continuity; for, as Ken Hirschkop points out, broadcast television and radio, as well as print, significantly increased the "reach and force" of certain privileged utterances (Hirschkop, 1999:253).

The addressivity of film-, radio- and television-mediated utterances in the twentieth century, therefore, shared these key characteristics with those of the national culture of print discussed in Chapter Two. This means that the issues of access to the means

of production, of the lack of a sense of reciprocity, the denigration of simple speech genres, and the denigration of the role played by the listener- or viewer-participant continue to exert considerable influence on the cultural perception of meaning-making in contemporary Western culture(s). It is particularly significant, within this specific cultural context, therefore, that the key examples of computer-mediated textual art discussed in Section 3.2.3 demonstrate an addressivity that is significantly different from the norms of print culture.

Returning to the arguments of Chapter Two, it was noted that Bakhtin's aesthetics of novelistic discourse were based on an awareness of heteroglossia. It was also noted that Bakhtin valued this heteroglossia because it was important for the development of an important inter-subjective consciousness. However, whilst broadly accepting this argument, the details of this aesthetic judgement were critiqued in Chapter Two. It was argued there that these texts were indeed important but that they also paid 'the price of print' (see Section 2.5.3 & Section 2.6). Furthermore, following Hirschkop, it was then argued that an awareness of heteroglossia was only one facet in the development of the valuable inter-subjective consciousness described by Bakhtin, as it was also necessary for this consciousness that the participants were profoundly aware of their unique involvement in the processes of meaning-making.

This thesis argues, therefore, that any work of art that raises their reader-participant's awareness of their participation in the act of meaning-making is of value within contemporary Western culture, because this awareness serves as a corrective to the 'price of print' described in Chapter Two. Furthermore, these works of art are of value because this awareness can help to foster an important inter-subjective

consciousness in which social participants become profoundly aware of their own involvement in the processes of meaning-making.

In contrast to hypertext aesthetics discussed in Section 3.3.1-3.3.2, therefore, the aesthetic described by this thesis does not argue for total freedom for the reader; as it is possible for an awareness of participation in meaning-making to derive from a range of states of consciousness; such as choice, confusion and challenge which are not predicated on the absence of an authorial role. Similarly, unlike hypertext aesthetics, it does not specify a precise mechanism for facilitating this sense of awareness within the reader-participant, arguing instead that the hypertext link is just one effect amongst many that might facilitate this sense of awareness. Furthermore, in contrast with Robert Coover's literary hypertext aesthetic, this aesthetic welcomes any approach into practice (e.g. the use of the Internet and 'multimedia' elements such as animation) provided that they facilitate a mode of address that fosters an awareness of participation in meaning-making. Finally, in contrast, to the 'ergodic cybertext aesthetic' described by Aarseth, it argues that these do not have to provide a ludic challenge and that the important changes facilitated by this form of address are realised within the noematic sphere, as the value recognized by this aesthetic is predicted on the democratic intersubjective consciousness discussed in chapter two.

## Chapter Four – Methodology

### 4.1 The Epistemology of Practice-based Research

#### 4.1.1 An Emerging Epistemology

Practice-based research is a relatively new undertaking within UK higher education institutions (Evans, 1994:9 & UKCGE, 2001:29)<sup>1</sup>. This means that, compared with the established epistemologies of the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences there is less familiarity with the discourse surrounding the epistemologies of this approach (Dawson, 1994:16 & UKCGE, 1997).<sup>2</sup> This thesis will, therefore, adopt a reflexive approach to its research methodology; in order,

- to position the arguments presented by this chapter within the emerging traditions of this research epistemology;
- to recognize the instrumental role played by the researcher in this kind of research; and
- to recognize the practice-based epistemology adopted by this research informed the research outcomes reported.

In doing so, it pays particular attention to the status of theory within this research programme; as well as keeping a wary eye on the problematic relationships between research, theory and practice at this level of study. For as Colin Robson notes, in practitioner research there is:-

“A need to establish a clear *difference* of procedure between the research and the procedures of professional practice itself, to guard against... 'we knew that already' or ' we do that every day of our professional lives'” (Robson, 2002: 536)

This thesis addresses this issue by providing an account of its research methodology in this chapter, as well as a description of its practice methods in the next chapter. Furthermore, Section 4.2.1, below, addresses this ‘need’ explicitly by deploying the analytical language developed by researchers, such as Robson, studying the methodologies of related disciplines such as the humanities, design and the social sciences to state the methodical procedures of this research project (UKCGE, 1997:8).

The advantage of this approach is that it clearly demarcates the ‘research’ from the ‘practice’ elements of the programme by “framing the creative work as reflective experiment that illustrates and explores a theoretical question” (Radford and Bruton, 2003). In doing so, it provides an opportunity to explore the relationship between the theory and practice developed during the course of the research programme reported by this thesis. Furthermore, it goes some way towards fulfilling the obligation identified by the UKCGE to map “the route” taken by the researcher in arriving at a particular artistic outcome (UKCGE, 1997:8). In doing so, it provides a conceptual language to describe the relationship between the general aesthetic theory (described in Chapter Two and Chapter Three); and the aesthetic objects developed from it during the course of practice (discussed in Chapter Five).

This approach also integrates well with the methodology outlined by Mikhail Bakhtin in ‘Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences’. Here, he discussed the role of analysis in “the dismemberment of understanding into individual acts” in which “each individual act has its ideal semantic (content-filled) independence and

can be singled out from the concrete empirical act” (Bakhtin, 1986c:159). However, it should also be noted that Bakhtin also warns in this essay that there are significant problems when making too much of this kind of analysis; noting that “in actual, real concrete understanding these acts merge inseparably into a unified process” (Bakhtin, 1986c:159).

This point is significant in the context of practice-based research because the ‘dismemberment’ of the process by analysis into a series of independent, compartmentalised sub-processes provides a reductive account of ‘the route’ taken by a creative writing researcher and their role in describing it. In particular, it ignores the participative and holistic qualities of this kind of research. It also runs the risks of over-reaching itself by hiding the serendipitous and recursive aspects of practice-based research and the contingent nature of the practice outcomes reported.

The ‘route map’ provided in this chapter, therefore, addresses these shortcoming in abstract analysis by also providing:-

- A memoir dealing with the motivation for undertaking this research (see section 4.2.2);
- A description of the course of study (See Section 4.2.3);
- A description of the preparatory practice undertaken in the course of this research (See Section 4.2.4) ; and
- A social evaluation of the technology deployed (4.2.5).

In doing so, it seeks to address the “relationship of a systematic enquiry to creativity and serendipity” (Biggs, 2000). It does this by advancing a Bakhtinian model of practice that recognizes explicitly the role played by all of these phenomena in the research outcomes reported.

However, in following this approach, it also recognizes that it departs from the replicable experimental model and the falsifiable hypothesis that form the cornerstones of laboratory-based research. However, this thesis argues that this is neither unusual nor unwarranted. Robson, for example, reported that in the social sciences ‘action research’ routinely relies on the judgments of the practitioner-experimenter because their insights “help in the design, carrying out and analysis of useful and appropriate studies” (Robson, 2002:534). Furthermore, Robson described this kind of research as utilising the ‘researcher-as-instrument’; a concept developed in Section 4.1.2 below (Robson, 2002:167).

This thesis similarly recognizes that the use of this kind of testimony departs from the norms of academic writing in the Humanities. Carole Blair, Julie R. Brown and Lesley A. Baxter note that academic discourse routinely suppresses the author’s motivations in “the interest of achieving an impersonal, “expert” distance and tone” (Blair *et al.* ,1999:563). However, whilst recognizing that the use of autobiographical testimony is not unproblematic in Literary Studies, this thesis argues that authorial intentions are not entirely alien to it either. In many of the standard texts of English Literature, for example, the interpretations and evaluations of author-participants are routinely used as arguments in support of the intellectual



position of others (see for example, Wayne Booth's use of Henry James' conception of character in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* – Booth, 1991:104).

This thesis maintains, therefore, that these departures from the epistemology of other forms of research are warranted because they recognize an important epistemological feature of practitioner knowledge; namely, that practice-based research is not only a process undertaken by a researcher but that it is also a process undergone by them as well. It argues, therefore, that their first person accounts of their motivations and the experience of the process are a necessary element in the reporting of this kind of research.

#### **4.1.2 Researcher-as-Instrument and Design Talk-Back**

In the essay 'The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis' Bakhtin recognizes the instrumental role played by the researcher in microphysics, noting:-

"The experimenter constitutes part of the experimental system."

(Bakhtin, 1986a:123)

Bakhtin developed this notion in the context of the humanities by arguing that:

"The person who understands (including the researcher himself)  
becomes a participant in the dialogue, although on a special level

(depending on the area of understanding or research)" (Bakhtin, 1986a:125).

More recently, Robson notes that social scientists working in 'real world' research have developed a similar awareness of the role of researcher within research. He notes that they describe research methodologies that involve using the 'researcher-as-instrument' (Robson, 2002:167) in which the judgements of the researcher and their further analysis of those judgments are the research outcome.

A very similar concept has also been developed in the design epistemology described by Donald Schön. Schön made the reflections of the researcher-designer central to his epistemology by developing the concept of design 'talk-back'. In explaining this concept, Schön noted that:-

"The designer's moves tend, happily or unhappily, to produce consequences other than those intended. When this happens, the designer may take account of the unintended changes he has made in the situation, in accordance with his initial appreciation of it, the situation "talks back" and he responds to the situation's talk-back."  
(Schön, 1983:79)

Schön further describes this experience of talk-back, noting that it is:-

"a reflective conversation with the situation" (Schön, 1983:103)

This thesis, therefore, adopts a similar epistemological position and utilises the judgments and actions of the 'researcher-participant' as research findings. It also argues that the impression formed by the researcher and the changes made by them whilst deploying an aesthetic theory within a practice situation are important for developing an understanding of their aesthetic position.

However, this thesis also recognizes that this kind of research methodology needs to demonstrate methodological rigour in its application of these judgments. Bakhtin, for example, describes the researcher as working on a special level; whilst, Schön predicates his concept of practice-based research on "a continuing process of self-education" (Schön, 1983:299); and Robson argues that this kind of research requires "well trained and experienced investigators" to ensure its success (Robson, 2002:167).

This thesis, therefore, recognizes that there is a need to 'calibrate' the 'researcher-as-instrument'. Moreover, it argues that this calibration can be achieved by a researcher-participant by their direct engagement with an extensive and reflective research programme, like the one described in Section 4.2.

This thesis also recognizes that there are limits to rational design and the insights that the practitioner can provide into their practice outcomes. This chapter, therefore, concludes by setting out an epistemological claim in Section 4.3 rooted in the conception of meaning-making described by the Bakhtin Circle, which charts the limits of the researcher-as-instrument.

## **4.2 A Practice-based Research Methodology: Providing the Route**

### **4.2.1 An Analytical Overview of Methodology**

The research methodology adopted by the research programme reported in this thesis was a multi-cyclical, mixed, qualitative, flexible, real-world methodology that incorporated the features from design research (Schön, 1983) and action research drawn from the social sciences (Robson, 2002), discussed below.

This methodology involved several cycles of research involving a mixture of hermeneutics (rooted in the interpretative models of literary and cultural studies developed by Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov)<sup>3</sup>, design talk-back (derived from the reflective practitioner model provided by Donald Schön (Schön, 1983 & Schön, 1987) interleaved by critical evaluations based on the models of action research provided by Colin Robson (Robson, 2002:201).

The methodologies of hermeneutics, which garnered the arguments described in detail in Chapters One, Two and Three, were utilised as a theory-generating research methodology (Robson, 2002:62). The ultimate outcome of this methodological approach was to generate the arguments and conclusions of Chapter Three and Chapter Six. The design and evaluation methodologies were then utilised as theory-verification research (Robson, 2002:62) in which the theory developed by this hermeneutical approach was tested as a design aesthetic, and then evaluated through the real-world experience of 'talk-back' by the researcher-participant (see section 4.2.2 for a full exposition of these phases of the research programme). The outcome

of this phase of the research was the illumination through practice of the theoretical account of the aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art discussed in Chapter Five.

Each of these methodologies involved a qualitative approach in which the researcher-participant systematically recorded and acted upon their observations and judgements through the course of the practice (see Section 4.2.5 below). In the hermeneutical phase, the qualitative data gathered was drawn as arguments from primary and secondary sources. In the design phase, the qualitative data was gathered from the researcher-participant's experiences of the talk-back provided by all the stages of the design process (see section 4.2.4).

A flexible, cyclical research programme was employed. This involved a series of research activities similar to the "exploratory journey" described by academic-artist Deborah Wood, in which she "moved from praxis to theory and back again" (Wood, 2003:46). In the case of this research, each cycle involved a hermeneutical investigation that resulted in the production of a tentative theoretical position (the initial 'hypertext' position discussed in 4.2.2; the 'cybertext' position, and the dialogic position - discussed further in Section 4.2.4). Each of these positions was then explored through cycles of preparatory practice (see Section 4.2.4), which were then evaluated by the researcher-participant.

In the course of this preparatory practice the general aesthetic theories under investigation were honed into what Malcolm Le Grice has described as a 'generative' theory (that is, a more localised set of ideas that "aids, supports and provides a framework of criteria for an artist in the creative practice of art"(Le Grice, 1994:41)).

The later stages of this process of honing were achieved by direct engagement with practice in a manner similar to the process described by the poet Lawrence Upton in 2003. Upton noted that:-

“The making is the process of finding out what it is that I am making and it is often only in the later stages of my writing that I am able to give an indication of what the final text might look like” (Upton, 2003)<sup>4</sup>

In the case of my preparatory practice, the broad aesthetic interests had been established prior to the making process; however, there was still a sense of discovery as the work moved from being a generalised idea into a particular instance that could be experienced directly. Furthermore, there was always some aspect of the ‘talk-back’ from practice that was serendipitous and had not been predicted prior to the making process.

In each case, the wide variety of ‘talk-back’ from the preparatory practice and the application of these generative theories served both as an input for the next cycle of theory-generation research and as a set of experiences to calibrate the researcher-as-instrument. In contrast, therefore, to the methodology adopted by Maria Mencia, in which she used “practice-based work as theory” (Mencia, 2003:7), this research programme utilised the design process, the development of generative ideas and the design outcome as research results; results which were used to attest and modify the theoretical aspects of this research.

#### 4.2.2 Providing the Route: Motivations for this Research

A significant moment for the research described by this thesis came in the mid-1990s when I first established my own website and moved some of my creative work from book- to computer-mediation. Prior to this time, my writing practice had involved me, for the most part, in producing work for publication in books and magazines. I had published two collections of poetry for adults, *Biology Lessons* and *Sounding Out* (Stewart, 1999a & Stewart, 2001a) and a non-fiction academic review, *Partnerships between Science and Industry* (Stewart, 1999b). I had also completed (and published on the World Wide Web) *this little world*, a book-length memoir of a 2,000 mile walk I undertook in the summer 1996 (Stewart, 2001b). The reception of this last work drew my attention to the importance for my practice of the move to computer-mediation.

The reception of *this little world* intrigued me. This memoir had been conceived originally as a book-mediated, linear, semi-autobiographical memoir.

However, in a way that I could not explain at the time, this work was changed as a result of being presented over the Internet. I became aware (via the questions in their e-mails) that my reader-participants were dipping into the work, following links, jumping in and out of the text; rather than reading it as a continuous narrative.

Furthermore, I became aware over a period of years that they wanted to have a dialogue with me and to share their experiences and knowledge; to the extent of becoming collaborators, by sending suggestions for additions and amendment to my text. I even received a number of e-mails from webmasters requesting that I make a link to their sites. I was intrigued, and I was confused.

I began to read around the subject of computer-mediated textual art over the next eighteen months. I discovered work by John Cayley, Michael Joyce, Shelley Jackson and Geoff Ryman. I also conducted a short, informal literature search and read a number of fascinating accounts of these texts by theorists such as George P. Landow. However, despite being intrigued by the opportunities describe by Landow and others I was still confused. What did all of these accounts mean for my practice?

Towards the end of 1998 I began to include 'hypertext' elements into my work. I considered, initially at least, that this aspect of my practice was a technical challenge (i.e. I needed to learn how to do this). However, despite an initial pleasure in the coding process, I found to my dismay that I did not relish conducting this new kind of practice; mainly because I was unable to interpret the welter of talk-back I received from it. I was unable to make even the most elementary design decisions. I was presented with a legion of possibilities but with no effective way of exploring them. I also came to realize over time that I knew how to do things without knowing why I was doing them. I was forced to acknowledge that my appreciative system was not adequate for this task.

I persisted with this practice, but I regularly asked myself a series of rhetorical questions:-

- Why was I using a computer in my practice?
- Was I writing? Was I doing something else?
- Was I going about my practice in the 'right way'?



- Did I value the work I was producing?

Elsewhere, I have described the research reported by this thesis as practice-informing research; that is, it is a programme that “has allowed me to modify successfully my practice in the light of [its] findings” (Stewart, 2004e). It has required me to step back from my day-to-day engagement with my practice and to conduct an abstracted theoretical analysis of my aesthetic evaluations so that I could return to practice with a renewed sense of its value.

In hindsight, I have come to realise that this failure in my appreciative system was a pivotal moment in the framing of the research reported by this thesis. My early practice was unsuccessful because it focused solely on what Bakhtin described as “the technical apparatus of aesthetic execution” rather than on the “aesthetic object” discussed in Section 2.4.2 (Bakhtin, 1990c:267). However, this ‘failure’ was valuable in itself because it led me to question my assumptions and my interpretations of pre-existing theoretical accounts of these works.

In 1999 I became a mature student at the University of Luton, UK. I studied a number of courses in literary theory, new media and creative writing. I particularly enjoyed the creative writing modules in poetry and short fiction. Both Dr Lauri Ramey and Dr John Moore (the course leaders for these modules) encouraged me to take a more experimental approach in my practice. As a result of this encouragement, I produced a series of small cardboard constructions (see Stewart, 2005b) that drew my attention to the importance of materiality and addressivity in my practice. Significantly, these positive and informing experiences also motivated me to

reconfigure my growing dissatisfaction with my computer-based practice into the exploration of the aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art described by this thesis.

### 4.2.3 The Course of Study

#### *Phase One – The Literature Review and Skills Acquisition*

The first phase of my formal research programme took the form of a number of strands of activity that ran concurrently through October 2001- May 2002.

- Strand One was a formal literature review of the theoretical accounts of hypertext, cyberculture and new media;
- Strand Two was a parallel literature review of the wider diversity of computer-mediated textual art;
- Strand Three was a series of practical computer sessions (html, basic PHP programming and SQL database management); and
- Strand Four was an extended series of practitioner sessions, producing creative writing using computer media.<sup>5</sup>

For completeness, it is also worth mentioning that at this time I also received some formal education in my supervision tutorials with Dr John Moore. I also attended the research training programme organized by the University of Luton (covering generic research skills such as library searches, academic writing, research ethics etc.). The

common aim of this early phase of my research programme was to enable myself to be a *researcher-as-instrument*.

### *Testing the Hypertext Position*

After this initial period of eight months, I engaged in the first round of theory-verification research to investigate the hypertext position generated by the hermeneutic research undertaken in Phase One. To do this, I wrote several versions of the hypertext poem *Learning* (the details of which are discussed below under preparatory practice) in June-July 2002. The outcome of the first phase of my research programme was an awareness of the limitations of the aesthetics of hypertext, discussed in Chapter Three.

### *Phase Two – The Cybertext Position*

The second phase of my research programme took the form of a number of activity strands that ran concurrently through September 2002-April 2003.

- Strand One was a formal literature review of theoretical accounts of cybertext;
- Strand Two was an on-going review of a number of on-line communities showcasing new works of computer-mediated textual art (the Webartery list, the Rhizome list, the trAce forum, the ELO & EPC websites);

- Strand Three was a series of practical computer sessions (PHP programming, SQL database management and image manipulation software, such as Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia Fireworks and Paint Shop Pro); and
- Strand Four was the on-going series of practitioner sessions, producing the ‘cybertextual’ works discussed below.

### *Testing the Cybertext Position*

My second round of theory-verification research investigated the cybertext position. To do this, I produced *The Castle Gardens* (the details of which are discussed below under preparatory practice) concurrently with the activities noted above. The outcome of the second phase of my research programme was an awareness of the limitations of the aesthetics of cybertext, discussed in Chapter Three.

### *Phase 3- The Turn to Bakhtin*

The third phase of my research began with an in-depth study of the ideas of the Bakhtin Circle from April-August 2003<sup>6</sup>. The chief benefit of this hermeneutic activity was that it gave me an architectonic understanding of meaning-making and an opportunity to contextualise my hither-to unassimilated impressions of talk-back. This phase resulted in me being able to conceptualise the links between my print-based practice and my new practice. It also enabled me to interpret and evaluate my computer-mediated practice in a systematic and informing manner.

### *Phase 4 – The Bakhtinian Position*

The fourth phase of my research programme took the form of a number of strands of activity that ran concurrently through September 2003-March 2004.

- Strand One was the development of an aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art;
- Strand Two was the on-going review of a number of on-line communities showcasing new works of computer-mediated textual art (the Webartery list, the Rhizome list, trAce forum, ELO & EPC websites);
- Strand Three was a series of practical computer sessions (animation and sound manipulation using Macromedia Flash and Sonic Foundry Sound Forge); and
- Strand Four was participating in a number of academic conference and workshops (including being a conference panellist at Hypertext '03 at Nottingham University in August 2003 and an artist-participant at textlab - a 'Writers for the Future' project at Nottingham Trent University in November 2003).

My third round of theory-verification research investigated an early iteration of the aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art described by this thesis. To do this, I produced three new pieces *Ontology*, *Poeima* and *Choice/Cuts* (the details of which are discussed below under preparatory practice) concurrently with the activities noted above. The outcome of the fourth phase of my research programme was the initial development of the aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art and the illumination of certain key aspects of this aesthetic through practice.

*Phase 5 – Writing-Up*

The fifth phase of my research programme took the form of a number of strands of activity that ran concurrently through April 2004-May 2006.

- Strand One was the production of this thesis document;
- Strand Two was an on-going participation in a number of on-line communities and presenting my new works of computer-mediated textual art for informal ‘peer-review’ (the Webartery list, the Rhizome list, trAce forum, ELO & EPC websites);
- Strand Three was the production of ‘Homecoming’ discussed in Chapter Five; and
- Strand Four was presenting my research findings at a number of academic conference and workshops (including being a symposium presenter at Incubation 3 at Nottingham Trent University in July 2004).

The outcome of the fifth phase of my research programme was the full development of the aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art and the illumination of this aesthetic through practice

**4.2.4 Preparatory Practice**

A number of examples of practice were produced during the course of the research programme described in Section 4.2.2. These examples have been arranged

chronologically in this section and grouped into the theory verification phases identified in the previous section – the ‘hypertext’ phase, the ‘cybertext’ phase and the ‘awareness of participation’ phase - to chart the progress of this research.

A number of other pieces were also produced during the course of this research programme. These pieces were produced primarily to test decisions made about the technology adopted during these early design phases and to facilitate the acquisition of various production skills required by this practice. These pieces have also been included in the next section to complete the process map.

### *The Hypertext Position*

The first piece produced during the formal phase of this research was the computer-mediated poem, *Learning* (Stewart, 2002c). The pre-practice aim of this piece was to investigate the ‘hypertext’ position described in Section 3.3.1 & 3.3.2. The design of the piece was initially, therefore, based on the notion that hypertext links facilitate a sense of reader-empowerment. It was implemented using hand-coded html pages (the subsequent reworking of this piece was reformatted using Macromedia Dreamweaver 4.0 and MX).

However, after reviewing the initial design phase I became dissatisfied with the visual impact of the html text-link (denoted conventionally in html by a coloured, underlined word) on this work. After some adjustments, I chanced upon the idea of hiding these links, by placing them on images that were the same colour as the background of the page.

The design talk-back from this small change was very illuminating for two reasons. Firstly, this change produced a reading experience that involved moving the mouse around the margins of the page in a search of links. This was significant because this provided me with a first-hand experience of a reading that was faltering, frustrating and very slow (the very opposite of the reader empowerment). Secondly, this change was informing because it drew my attention to the role of colour and image in these texts. In my initial iteration, this text had been black text on a white background. However, on reading this text again I decided that it would be more significant for the overall reading experience to invert the colour scheme; to suggest to the reader-participant with this visual cue that they were fumbling in the darkness beyond the illumination of the visible line (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the script of 'Learning').

The outcome of this initial round of theory-verification research was the realization that the hypertext position was not an adequate aesthetic account of this practice, and my subsequent decision to investigate the cybertext position (described in 3.3.3).

### *Cybertext Position*

In April 2003 I began work on *The Castle Gardens* (see Stewart, 2002a) to illuminate the cybertext position (described in Section 3.3.3). This text was designed, initially, to investigate Aarseth's ergodic 'path of discovery' (discussed in Section 3.3.3). It was implemented using the server-side scripting language PHP, html and an SQL database.



Over the next three months *The Castle Gardens* mutated into an unreliable multi-user experience. The text presented a range of game-style challenges to the reader-participant that they were required to solve in order to progress through the text.

<sup>7</sup>However, despite the ludic and multi-user elements in its design it became clear to me that these were not, for me at least, the most interesting aspects of *The Castle Gardens*.

In September to November 2002, I expanded the ‘multi-user’ functionality (that facilitated communication between the reader-participants) of *The Castle Gardens*.

As part of this design upgrade I developed a rather rough and unreliable implementation of an ELIZA-like program within *The Castle Gardens*<sup>8</sup>. Shortly afterwards I had an opportunity to watch a group of MA students reading the output from this program. I was initially rather embarrassed that the upgrade did not perform to my design specifications (subsequent changes in the specifications of PHP and a change in server and SQL version have resulted in *The Castle Gardens* and other pieces written in PHP such as *Tomorrow* becoming highly unstable).

However, I was also intrigued by the way that the students interpreted the fragmented output as the speech of an inarticulate character. What was most striking was the contrast between the written ‘dialogue’ occurring through the program and the verbal dialogue that occurred within the media lab. Within the program, the students teased and flirted with the chatterbot program in character. However, their verbal conversation focused on their interpretation of the events occurring within the program. They verbalised tentative hypotheses; prefacing their comments with expression such as ‘She is trying to say ...’, ‘I think that...’ and ‘This means that...’.

They also then argued with each other's hypotheses, in an on-going interpretative dialogue.

I had been engaging with a wide selection of computer-mediated textual art at this time, and as a result of these diverse encounters, I had become progressively more aware of the participative character of these experiences. This encounter in the media lab has, however, brought home to me the importance of 'responsive understanding' in all acts of meaning-making.

Furthermore, I realized, on reflection, that this was a useful insight for my research project. It helped me to recognize that I had become conscious of my participation within a whole range of meaning-making events beyond the confines of computer-mediated textual art.

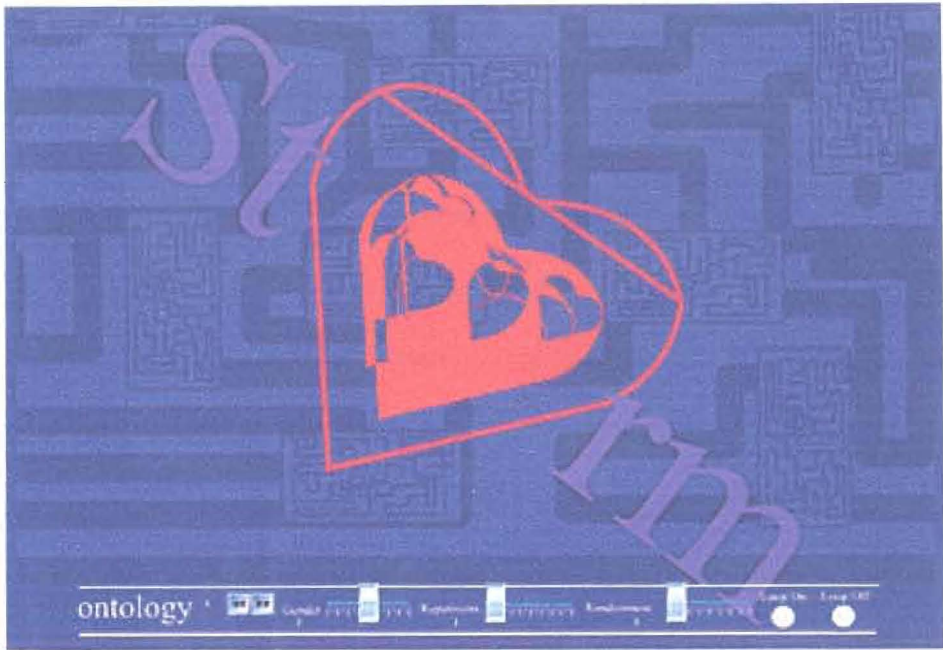
The outcome of this round of theory-verification research was the qualification of the game-based aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art (discussed in Chapter Three); the recognition of the importance of participation in all acts of meaning-making; and my subsequent decision to investigate this position through the aesthetic described in Chapter Two and Three.

#### *The Awareness of Participation in Meaning-making Position*

Between September 2003 and March 2004, I developed three pieces to illuminate aspects of the aesthetic position described in Section 3.4. The design of these pieces was initially, therefore, based on the theoretical position that the mode of address of these works can bring about an awareness of participation in the event of meaning-

making. Furthermore, they were designed to investigate the hypothesis that a variety of means (such as links, buttons, click and drag, input forms etc.) could be deployed to facilitate the development of this awareness. All three projects were implemented using Actionscript and Macromedia Flash.

*Ontology* (Stewart, 2004c) was based on a poem published in my *Sounding Out* collection that dealt with the contingent, 'on-going-ness' of being (see Appendix 1 for a full copy of the text of this poem). In the computer-mediated textual art adaptation, a series of buttons were devised that encouraged the reader-participant to explore aspects of the presentation of the sound and animation of this text. These controls were designed to make loops out of individual lines, to provide opportunities to jump from line to lines in a non-linear fashion, to change the gender of the reading voice and to produce echoing repetitions of individual lines. The overall design objective was to produce a fluid reading experience that involved the reader-participant in a playful exploration of these controls; and so facilitated their awareness of their participation in meaning-making.



*Figure 1 - Screen Shot of 'Ontology' by Gavin Stewart*

The first design objective was largely achieved because of the flexibility of Macromedia Flash in manipulating the sound and animated elements. The piece addressed the reader-participant as a co-creator, with a similar role in the process of meaning-making to an orchestral conductor or a DJ and, in manipulating the controls, the reader-participant became aware of their participation. However, my own experiences of playing with early versions of this work suggested that it was less successful in its second objective as it felt as though I was manipulating a tool rather than engaging with a work of art. This outcome was not a surprise because, as Maria Mencia has observed, issues of tool-ness “pop-up constantly with digitally produced interactive work” (Mencia 2003: 53).

The controls for *Ontology* were subsequently redesigned in direct response to this design talk-back. Each control was coded with an aleatoric statement so that it was

slightly less reliable in its operation, so that the reader-participant was less likely to feel a secure sense of mastery over the operations of the piece.

The second piece, *Poeima*, was designed in response to the issues of agency raised by *Ontology* (Stewart, 2004d). Its design objective was to provide a mysterious experience of the eventfulness of meaning-making for a reader-participant. It was designed using a series of call and response elements (rather than a pre-existing text) that came together into a text at the moment of reading (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the script of this poem). Furthermore, this piece was designed with an array of unlabelled mouse-over effects (arranged in a circular interface) that manipulated the text and sound files in accordance with the actions of the reader-participant.

The initial design talk-back from this piece was very instructive. It provided a marvellous but *very* mysterious reading experience. An introductory text was added, therefore, to provide a frame for the work and to draw attention to the fact that there was an issue around the concept of meaning-making that needed to be addressed through this piece. Furthermore, an array of visual clues was added to the piece; the call and response cycle was picked out by an indicator (positioned in the bottom right hand corner of the screen); similarly, a circle of status indicators was added to the circular interface, to aid orientation within the time cycle of the piece.

I demonstrated this piece at a number of seminars and symposia over the summer of 2004 and the response of various participants suggested that it raised some sense of awareness in its reader-participants. However, even reader-participants experienced in reading computer-mediated textual art were bewildered by the context and the overwhelming oddness of the experience.



Figure 2 - Screen Shot from 'Poiema' by Gavin Stewart

The design objectives of *choice/cuts* were built on the design talk-back provided by *Ontology* and *Poiema* (Stewart, 2004a). It deployed a wide range of effects including buttons, faders and click-and-drag effects to manipulate a complex of sound, text and image elements. It also drew on a real-world issue, to provide a specific context for the piece; to suggest that there is a correlation between the experience of participation within the work and the issue of obligatory uniqueness in the wider, social world.

The implementation of this work involved a long period of coding. There was, therefore, a considerable period of time between my conception of this piece and my first reading of the work. I was, therefore, struck by the way this piece drew me into being aware of my own act of interpretation.

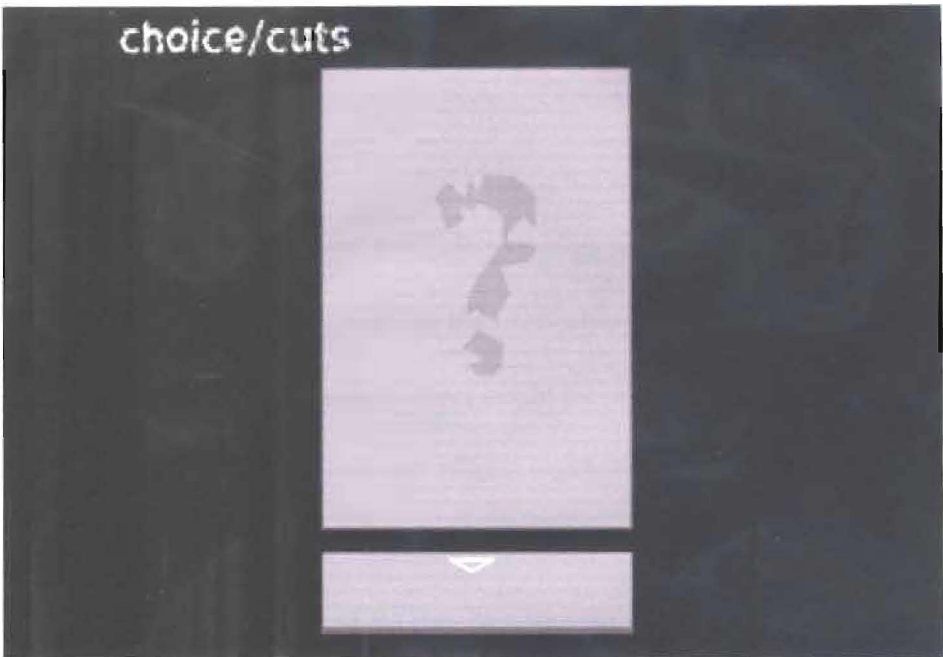


Figure 3 - Screen Shot of the initial state of 'choice/cuts' by Gavin Stewart



Figure 4 - Screen Shot from 'choice/cuts' by Gavin Stewart



The outcome of this round of theory-verification research was, therefore:-

- The affirmation that it was possible to design a work of art that raises an awareness of participation in the act of meaning-making;
- The affirmation that this awareness could be raised by a number of methods (e.g. by buttons, by mouse-over effects and by faders);
- The decision to investigate, through further practice, the issues involved in designing a larger work of art that provides an awareness of participation in an act of meaning-making;
- The decision to investigate through further practice the relationship between a particular awareness of participation in a particular act of meaning-making and the wider consciousness discussed in sections 3.4 and 3.5; and
- The decision to investigate these issues more fully through the practice described in Chapter Five.

#### **4.2.5 Technology and Skills Acquisition Pieces**

In his essay ‘The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art’ Bakhtin argued that the practitioner should understand “the technical apparatus of aesthetic execution” (Bakhtin, 1990c:267). Furthermore, he argues that they should understand its construction (Bakhtin, 1990c:267). The UKCGE developed this point further, noting that research practitioners should be able to justify their “actions and decisions relating to process and product” (UKCGE, 1992).



To this end, the research programme reported above involved me learning some elements of computer science (such as object-oriented programming and abstraction layers), a range of computer technologies (such as html, PHP, SQL and Actionsript) and a number of computer packages (such as Macromedia Dreamweaver, Macromedia Flash, Macromedia Fireworks, Adobe Photoshop and Sonic Foundry/Sony Soundforge) described above. It also involved me in developing expertise in evaluating the suitability of these technologies for my practice.

In this section, these fundamental design decisions are examined as part of the mapping of the process of this research programme. This mapping procedure is undertaken to recognize the importance of these decisions to the practice outcomes<sup>9</sup>. It is also undertaken to recognize that a number of serendipitous social and economic factors played a role in the shaping of these design decisions and the practice outcomes. Furthermore, these changes are mapped because, following Roger Silverstone's dictum that "technology is social in production and social in consumption" (Silverstone, 1995:11), this thesis recognizes that these technological decisions played a critical role in the construction of the social context of my practice.

The practice described in Section 4.2.4 above was marked by a series of technological shifts:

1. The original move from print-based technologies to html (described in Section 4.2.2 above);

2. The move from hand-crafted html to the production of dynamic html pages; with the adoption of a server-side scripting language and a database technology (PHP and SQL); and
3. The shift to client-side animation technology (Macromedia Flash).

As Section 4.2.2 above noted, the decision underlying the first shift in my practice was taken in a naïve manner. Like many print writers at the time, I perceived the World Wide Web as an interesting novelty with the potential to provide me with a wider readership for my pre-existing practice.

In contrast, the technological decisions taken during the course of this research programme were made in a deliberate and informed manner. Furthermore, these technological deployments were tested with a number of examples of practice; intended to test both my assumptions and understanding of the technology involved. However, despite the deliberate nature of these design experiments, it is important to recognize that these decisions also involved a certain amount of serendipity, as these decisions had ramifications for the research process and research outcomes that could not be foreseen at the time of making these decisions.

The decision to adopt PHP and SQL in May 2002, came about as a result of the design talkback from the hypertext poem *Learning*; which led me to investigate the cybertext position described in 3.3.3. My background research into these works suggested that a number of pre-existing technologies were suitable for developing an Internet-based Aarsethian cybertext (e.g. - CGI/perl, Coldfusion, Storyspace, JAVA, Python and PHP). Each of these technologies offered some desirable features: the

necessary facility to manipulate a structured database of text; or the facility to present this database as a multi-user text; or the facility to disseminate this text widely through a standard Internet browser. However, the research programme described by this thesis had a very small budget for software (and no budget at all for developing hardware) so PHP was selected from this cluster of technologies because:-

- It was an open-source scripting language, with a large and supportive developer community;
- There was considerable PHP scripting expertise in my department; and
- I was provided with free and unlimited access to a PHP-enabled server.

I eventually developed three artistic projects that explored the potential of PHP for the practice described by this thesis.

*Code 1 to x* (see Stewart, 2005a) and *Guilty, Not Guilty* (Stewart, 2002b) were small-scale, generative projects that explored aspects of the regular expressions and string manipulation functions of PHP. The initial artistic impetus for these pieces arose from reading Charles Hartman's book *Virtual Muse: Experiments in Computer Poems* (Hartman, 1996). However, whilst I was developing these works, I found myself working within a community of developers who were interested in developing social software projects (such as community bulletin boards and e-learning applications). Their enthusiasm for this kind of software and their generosity with their code encouraged me to develop a third test project, *Tomorrow* (Stewart, 2003d), which made use of modified examples of code they discussed. *Tomorrow* presented a number of technical challenges. Nonetheless, despite contracting a severe

case of the ‘debugging blues’ whilst implementing this project, the continuing support provided by this community (the informal testing and debugging services) encouraged me to develop *The Castle Gardens*.

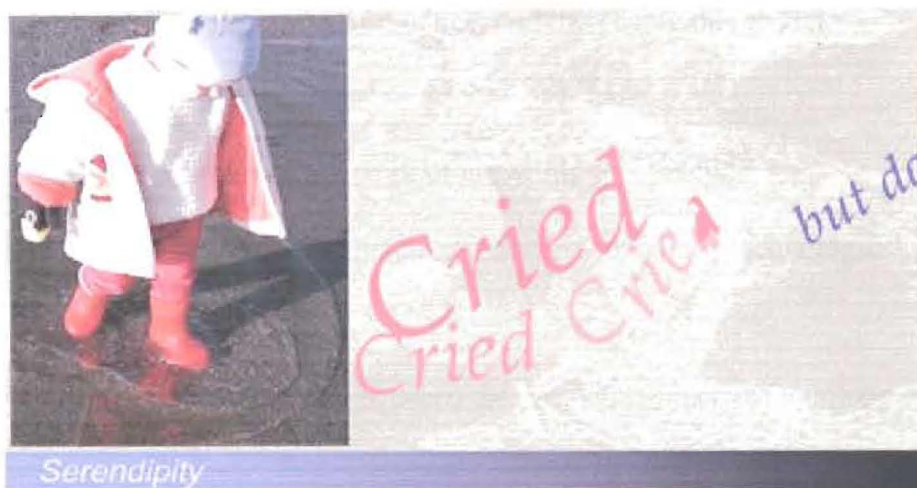
It is important to recognize, therefore, that the selection of PHP technologies was not a neutral decision in the development of this practice because it also played a role in constructing the social context surrounding my practice as well.

The third change of technology deployed (noted above) came about as a result of the design talkback from the cybertext *The Castle Gardens*; which led me to investigate the new aesthetic position described in 3.4. My background research into these works suggested that a number of pre-existing technologies were suitable for developing this kind of text (e.g. - DHTML, Macromedia Director, Macromedia Flash etc.). Each of these technologies offered: the facility to develop the reciprocal addressivity described in Chapter Three; the facility to include animated, audio and visual elements in the text; the facility to use a scripting language to structure the reader-based changes in the text; and the facility to disseminate this text widely via a plug-in to a standard Internet browser. However, once again, social and economic factors shaped this design decision as well.

Macromedia Flash was selected eventually from this cluster of technologies because:-

- There was considerable Flash design expertise in my department; and
- I was provided with free and unlimited access to a Flash-enabled machine.

I eventually developed four poetic works, *Landfill*, *Serendipity*, *PS* and *The Making of P and G* that explored the potential of Macromedia Flash for the practice described by this thesis (Stewart, 2003a; Stewart, 2003b; Stewart, 2003c; & Stewart, 2004b).



*Figure 5 - Screen Shot of 'Serendipity' by Gavin Stewart*

The decision to use Macromedia Flash brought me into contact with a different group of artists and programmers. This grouping was passionate about developing aural and visual elements in their practice. The technical facility and enthusiasm of this community helped and encouraged me, therefore, to deploy novel designs that featured animation and sound in works such as *Poietma* and *choice/cuts*.



*Figure 6 - Screen Shot of 'The Making of P and G' by Gavin Stewart*

### 4.3 The Epistemological Claims for this Practice-based Research

The final section of this chapter addresses the epistemological claims made by the practice-based methodology described in Sections 4.1 & 4.2 above. It does so by, first, advancing a dialogic model of practice, and then using this model:-

- To define the status of the work of art within this practice;
- To define the status of my practice within its social and technological context;
- To define the relationship between the aesthetic object and axiology in my research; and
- To assess the epistemological limitations of the ‘researcher-as-instrument’ methodology used in this research programme.

In Chapter Two, it was noted that the Bakhtin Circle described meaning-making as a socially and historically contingent activity. In Section 3.4.1, this thesis deployed this conception of meaning-making to reject the concept of an idealised or universal aesthetic, arguing, instead for a concept of value rooted in contingent and localised terms. This chapter takes a similar approach to the concept of artistic practice; by applying the Bakhtin Circles’ ideas of meaning-making and Bakhtin’s ideas of participation in practice in order to dismiss notions of the autonomous practitioner and the autonomous work of art. It describes, instead, a serendipitous and social model of practice, based on a unique series of dialogic interaction between the practitioner-participant, their theoretical research, their practice experiences (past and present), their appreciative system and the particularised social, historical and

material context of their current practice. It does this in order to recognize that the researcher-practitioner is involved in a series of unique dialogic encounters while conducting their practice and that these encounters are, by their very nature, set in the real world which is "a complex, relatively poorly controlled and generally 'messy' situation" (Robson, 2002:4).

This dialogic conception of practice is significant because it recognizes (explicitly) the role played by factors other than theoretical research in the practice outcomes. In the case of my research programme, for example, my pre-established social position as a writing practitioner, the historical moment, the institutional context of this research programme, the availability of certain technologies, the indirect influence drawn from Bakhtin's notions of the 'homecoming festival' and serendipity arising from technological decisions taken during the course of this research all shaped the practice outcomes reported.

This thesis argues, therefore, that the work of art produced by a researcher-practitioner, as a significant outcome of their practice, is the product of a series of unique events that are only *partially determined* by their research. This is to say that the work of art produced is the fruit of an extended dialogic encounter between the practitioner's aesthetic appreciations, based on both their new aesthetic theories and their wider appreciative system (held as new and pre-existing formalised aesthetic theories, non-formalised aesthetic judgments, formal and informal educative experiences, insights, tacit knowledge, hunches and desires), and a serendipitous and reflexive complex that arose out of the historical, material, social and artistic context that inform these particular moments of practice.

This dialogic conception of the production of the work of art within a research programme is productive, therefore, because it explains, for example, why many of the instances of practice discussed in this thesis have my pronounced philosophical interest, despite the huge range of modes of semiosis and subject matter recognized by the aesthetic theory, described in Chapter Three. Furthermore, it is productive because it describes an open-ended view of practice-based research that allows the practitioner to position their current practice as an instance of a wider set of works of art arising from the same general aesthetic understanding. This realization is particularly relevant for the long-term development of practice because it configures the theory generation processes of doctoral training as an open-ended and enabling sub-process that acts as a spring-board, propelling the practitioner onto further work.

Similarly, this conception of practice theorizes the manner in which the social and economic context (described in Section 4.2.5) informs both the practice outcomes described and the appreciative system developed. The work of art cannot, therefore, be abstracted either from the informing theory (developed by the researcher) or from the context of the practice. It is the product of the two, interacting in a unique, serendipitous and non-repeatable manner. This is an important point because it makes explicit the contingent nature of practice within a research programme (and the contingent nature of a research programme within practice).

This 'contingent' model of practice suggests, therefore, that the aesthetic theory derived from the practitioner research can not provide a definitive or exclusive account of their work, as such an account would run counter to the architectonic



conception of meaning-making provided by the Bakhtin Circle. Furthermore, this model of practice also maintains that there are real limits to the insights in their practice that can be attained by the practitioner using themselves as researcher-as-instrument, for although it is possible for the practitioner to be cognizant and reflective about their design intentions during the practice situation, they can not possibly account for every aspect of their practice or its context. Bakhtin, for example, argues in the essay ‘Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity’ that it is never possible for the self to see itself whole as an object (Bakhtin, 1990b:35 & Bakhtin, 1990b:38). This means that there will always be factors influencing the practitioner (and their practice) that are beyond their consciousness. Similarly, there will be aspects of the design process that will be experienced and appreciated by the practitioner, but not in a conscious manner.

This is not a new insight, of course, as the experience of artistic creativity has been one of the great abiding interests of Western philosophy. In ‘Ion’, Plato, for example, describes the experience of creativity as being ‘possessed’, noting that “the lyric poets are not in their senses when they make these lovely lyric poems.”(Plato,1995:15). Taking a less mystical tack, the young Bakhtin noted that:

“An author creates, but he sees his own creating only in the object to which he is giving form, that is, he sees only the emerging product of creation and not the inner, psychologically determinate, process of creation.” (Bakhtin, 1990a:6)

A number of contemporary academic tutors have also identified non-rational aspects of creative writing (Burroway, 2002:216 & Bolton, 2001:210). Even design-oriented authors such as Madison Smartt Bell point to “the inner process of imagination” (Bell, 1997:9). This thesis acknowledges a similar set of experiences, in that there are some aspects of this practice that have been experienced as deductions from theoretical analysis whilst others have been experienced as ‘serendipitous encounters’, ‘disappointments’ and ‘flashes of inspiration’.

This thesis rejects the argument that the researcher-practitioner can give a totalising explanation of their aesthetic object. It also rejects the argument that an aesthetic object designed to investigate a particular aesthetic position can demonstrate that position unequivocally. It argues, therefore, that there are a number of methodological difficulties that arise when the practitioner tries to frame their entire creative work as a reflective experiment.

The practice-based epistemology developed in this chapter makes, instead, the claim that the practitioner-researcher can frame the development of their design process as a reflective experiment that illuminates their theoretical concerns.

This more limited approach, therefore, supports the argument that the competences developed by this researcher-as-instrument ensures that my accounts of my design process, placed into context by an artistic statement, can be used to illuminate the claims made for the axiology described in Chapter Three. This concept of the reflective experiment forms the basis of the discussions of Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Five: The Design of Homecoming: Illuminating an Original Aesthetic of Computer-mediated Textual Art**

### **5.1 The Artistic Statement**

#### **5.1.1 Towards the Aesthetic Object: The ‘Homecoming’ Heuristic**

At the end of the essay ‘Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences’ Mikhail Bakhtin noted that:

"Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its  
homecoming festival" (Bakhtin, 1986c:170)

Clark and Holquist observed that this was the last piece of writing that Bakhtin saw through to publication (Clark and Holquist, 1984:341). This quote, therefore, appears to occupy the quixotic status of being last words of a thinker who challenged the very notion of the last word on any subject. This quote also takes the form of a generalization; which is particularly significant for a thinker whose early ‘phenomenological’ work challenged the role of generalisations in philosophical thinking. Furthermore, this sentence is of interest because it makes reference to a number of subjects, such as meaning and festival, which occupied Bakhtin for most of his long working life. For these reasons alone, the above quote makes an interesting point of reflection. However, the inclusion of the notion of a ‘homecoming’ in this sentence is also very intriguing.

One can only wonder at the exact nature of the homecoming envisaged by Bakhtin. Home appeared to be an important place for him. Clark and Holquist paint a picture

of Bakhtin in happier times, working at home “chatting with students or friends” (Clark and Holquist, 1984:330). Furthermore, late in his life Bakhtin enjoyed something of a professional homecoming festival with the rehabilitation of his earlier works. However, the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘homecoming’ are not ones that Bakhtin explored in detail in his extant work. Given his descriptions of the dialogic contest of language, of the public nature of carnival, and the unique and participatory qualities of meaning-making Bakhtin’s work suggest something quite different (at first sight, at least) from my initial understanding of the term as the arrival at a safe, fixed abode.

Bakhtin’s homecoming has fascinated me since I first read this essay. Initially, I was challenged by his conception of meaning-making. I found myself enjoying its argument even as I sought to refute its strictures. However, more recently I have used it as an heuristic tool (as a way of exploring my own ideas about meaning-making, mediation and participation) that has shaped the creative work, ‘Homecoming’, provided with this thesis (Stewart 2006e). I have found this idea of a homecoming festival productive as a key for producing work to illuminate the aesthetic it discusses. The homecoming festival is a particularly productive idea because it brings a number of key Bakhtinian terms into play; so that an exploration of this homecoming is also an opportunity to explore addressivity, the self/other relationship, the open body, participation and the role of mediation in meaning-making. Furthermore, I found this conception of a homecoming productive because it presented me with a unifying metaphor with which to frame the aesthetic object identified by this thesis.

‘Homecoming’ makes full use of the aesthetic described by this thesis to inform these experiences. The mode of address, and the way in which it is facilitated by the form and mediation of these meditations is an integral part of the themes that are explored. The piece is, therefore, also a ‘mediation’ - an exploration of the role played by the address, facilitated by computer mediation, on meaning-making. This dual status is recognized in the subtitle to the piece, which uses the term medi{t}ation.

### **5.1.2 Towards the Aesthetic Object: Material Considerations**

‘Homecoming’ draws on a number of technical features realized in the later examples of preparatory practice discussed in Chapter Four. It uses programming, sound, graphics, animation and alphabetic text as well the opportunities, such as links, buttons, click-and-drag and rollovers, afforded by the Graphical User Interface, to address its reader as a participant in the event of meaning-making. Like ‘Ontology’, ‘Poeima’ and ‘Choice/cuts’ it was produced using Macromedia Flash.

‘Homecoming’ is distributed via the Internet so that it has the widest opportunity for dissemination (a local, PC formatted CD-ROM version of ‘Homecoming’ is also provided with this thesis as an archived record of the work). It has been designed, therefore, with a number of specific technical issues in mind. For example, it has been broken up into a series of smaller files to reduce the initial time spent downloading the first file. Similarly, each file has been provided with a title, downloader and an introductory text to aid the orientation of the reader-participant within each meditation. Furthermore, it is designed to use software (browser and

Macromedia plug-in) and hardware (mouse, screen and computer) that are reasonably widely available at the time of writing.

### **5.1.3 Towards the Aesthetic Object: Design Aims and Artistic Motivations**

The initial design objectives (established by the preparatory practice discussed in Section 4.2.4) for ‘Homecoming’ were:-

- To design a work of art that illuminates the axiology of computer-mediated textual art (described by this thesis); and
- To investigate, through practice, the relationship between the awareness of participation in a particular act of meaning-making and the wider consciousness discussed in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

The design processes described in this chapter are intended, therefore, to illuminate arguments made in this thesis. However, it is important to note that the production of ‘Homecoming’ was motivated by more than just an academic response to the aesthetic described by this thesis. It also draws on my sense of awe at Bakhtin’s ambition for his conception of participation. ‘Homecoming’ has become, therefore, something of a paean (a hymn of exultation or triumph) to participation, which celebrates the reader-participant’s role in the event of meaning-making. This celebration takes many forms, some more obviously joyous than others, which are tinged also with my sense of trepidation at Bakhtin’s ideas. ‘Homecoming’,

therefore, provides a rather unruly homecoming party for this prodigal concept within contemporary Western culture.

‘Homecoming’ is designed to flaunt its own fluidity - to provide the reader-participant with a direct experience of amenability to modification during the act of interpretation. Furthermore, it is also designed to draw attention to the consequences of this fluidity. It embraces the uniqueness of the moment by providing a series of loops and returns that question the concept of repetition; but in doing so it produces a dauntingly relentless text that makes real-time demands on its reader-participant. This challenge to the reader-participant is also recognized within the design of ‘Homecoming’ and it makes a number of reflexive comments that draw attention to the experience it provides. The term meditation is, therefore, used to describe ‘Homecoming’ in an ambiguous way - one that nods toward the Western philosophic tradition of the recorded thoughts of thinkers, but also to the Eastern tradition of meditation that regards it as an activity.

## 5.2 Homecoming: Designing the Aesthetic Object

### 5.2.1 Homecoming: Common Features

There are a number of design features that are deployed across all the different meditations that make up 'Homecoming'. These common features are used throughout the piece to create a visual and aural frame that facilitates a sense of connectedness between the elements that make up this piece. These design features are intended to give some sense of coherence to the piece to avoid the charge of it being an unstructured "scatter of old magazines on a table" (Coover, 1999). They are also designed to frame the primary design objective of this piece - namely, to draw the reader-participant's attention to their participation in the event of meaning-making taking place.

These common design features include: -

- The use of common visual features;
- The use of common button features; and
- The use of common roll-over effects.

Every meditation in 'Homecoming' is built upon a common file structure. Each meditation has the same proportions (650 by 450 pixels when maximised). Each has a plain black background. The introduction section to each file involves a title, a quote from Mikhail Bakhtin, a downloader slider; within a double-boxed border. The



main section of each file has a black banner at the bottom with the name of the meditation and the author set out in white.

Many meditations share a common button design - based on a simple white or black square icon. The initial introduction to 'Homecoming', for example, has a white square displayed with the question "Are you willing?". The reader-participant can mouse-over this button and extend this question so that it then reads "Are you willing to welcome the prodigal?". 'Homecoming' will not proceed further until they click on this button.

The advantage of this common design feature is that it allows the reader-participant's experience of this encounter to guide them during their engagement with the more obscure sections of this work. The common button design, for example, is encountered first in the introduction with an accompanying text. However, by associating the square symbol with the idea of a button it is possible to deploy buttons in the later meditations as simple square icons without making the accompanying text visible. In the meditation 'Gross', for example, the reader-participant is initially presented with a screen that only contains white squares. When taken out of context this encounter appears obscure. However, the reader-participant's prior experience with this type of button in the introduction helps them to understand that they are being addressed with an array of choices that they need to investigate.

This integrated design objective is important for the overall objectives of the piece because it facilitates the design of intriguing experiences that require the reader-

participant to interrogate a button and so be aware of the role played by their decisions in the progression of their reading.

Each meditation also shares a series of common roll-over effects associated with the banner text situated at the bottom of the screen. Rolling over the title, for example, triggers a voice recording that provides the name of the meditation. By contrast the roll-over effect associated with the author's name triggers a more complicated action which selects randomly from a series of voice recordings. The reader-participant will, for example, be asked questions such as:-

- What does home mean?;
- Shouldn't your name be here?;
- Is this a meditation?;
- Does he call this finished?; and
- Do you feel at home now?"

These questions are designed to act as more than just localised rhetorical questions as they also serve to draw attention to the themes being addressed by the work.

Furthermore, the common use of the same voice recordings throughout

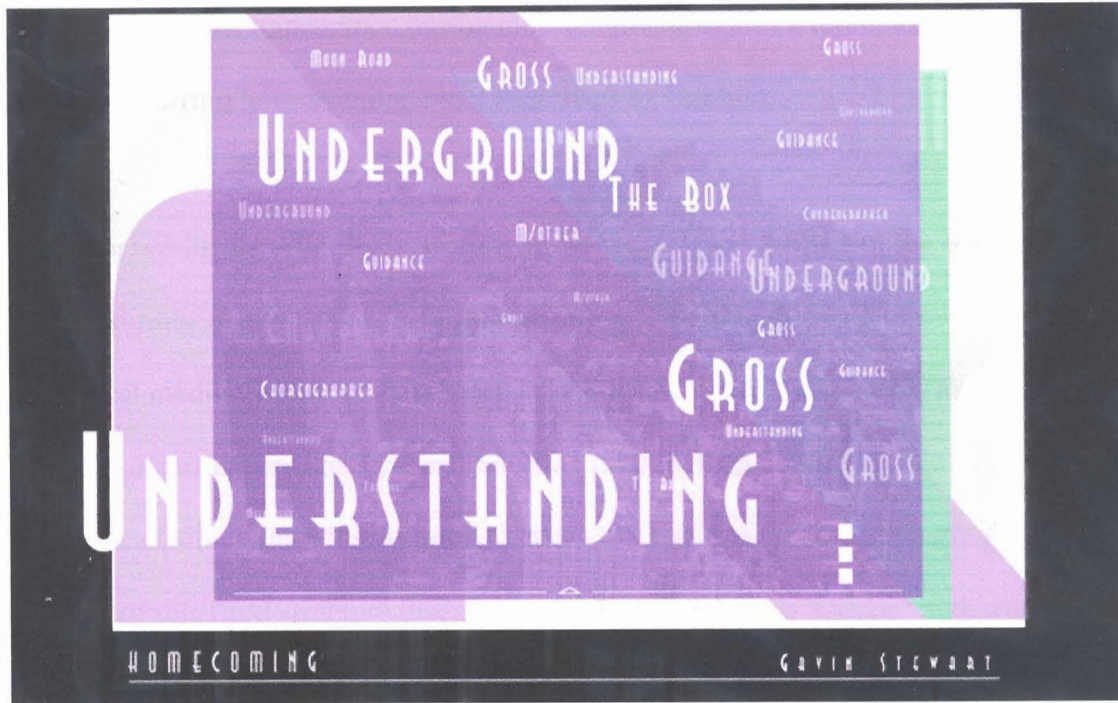
'Homecoming' also draws attention to themes that connect the separate meditations.

'Homecoming' also has a number of global design features that exploit the ability of networked computers to facilitate change (as discussed in Chapter Three). These global design features include:-

- The fluidity of contents of 'Homecoming'; and
- The fluidity of the reading order of 'Homecoming'.

The influence of Mikhail Bakhtin extends into many aspects of the design of 'Homecoming'. It is not surprising, therefore, that this piece makes use of its materiality to facilitate the production of an open-ended text that is in a state of becoming. The current contents of the project, therefore, represent an adequate iteration of 'Homecoming' rather than a closed off or 'bound' edition of this project. 'Homecoming' has been designed specifically to make maximum use of the facility of networked computers to update remote files so that it is a relatively simple task to add and amend the individual meditations that make up the project. Furthermore, the introductory and linking files have been designed so that it only requires very simple modifications to amend the contents to include additional material into the piece.

The facility of networked computers to design malleable texts has also been employed in the design of the introduction to produce a situation in which the individual meditations can be read in a variety of orders.



*Figure 7 - Screen Shot of the Introduction to 'Homecoming' by Gavin Stewart*

The visual and aural design of this introduction was heavily influenced by Michael Holquist's description of heteroglossia as a way of "conceiving the world as made up of a roiling mass of languages" (Holquist, 1990:69). The design comprises a series of differently sized, aleatorically-selected buttons that gradually change their size, position and text with time. The aleatoric display and the changes in prominence of the text not only suggest a dynamic sense of language but they also have the pragmatic advantage of marking a break with the print-based conventions of contents pages so that the introduction does not particularly privilege the link to one meditation over another.

The design of this unconventional contents page serves also to turn the introduction to 'Homecoming' into an experience that the reader-participant engages with over time. The individual meditations are designed to return to this ever-changing screen,

so that its periodic appearance during their reading provides a direct experience of the non-recurring homecoming event described by Bakhtin.

However, whilst this fluidity in reading order is an important part of the design of 'Homecoming' it also makes for a complication when structuring a discussion of the individual meditations in a linear thesis (Sections 5.2.2 –5.2.10 below). For in adopting a particular order in this discussion (and by then deploying this thesis in close association with 'Homecoming'), there is a real danger of undercutting the benefits of this fluid structure discussed above by implying a 'hidden' authorial intention, where none lies. This thesis, therefore, uses a series of sub-themes (as a running link between its discussions of individual meditations) to structure its arguments about the design of the individual meditations discussed below. These sub-themes include the relationship between ideas of home and self, the relationship between ideas of home and the body, the role of return in meaning-making, and the effort involved in participation. However, in adopting this structure, this thesis keeps a wary eye on the effects of this discourse on 'Homecoming,' by challenging the linearity of these linkages implied by this approach in Section 5.2.10.

### **5.2.2 The Box: Thinking Outside of**

There are a number of colloquial English expressions (such as "The lights are on but nobody's home!") that make an associative link between the home and the self. The meditation 'The Box' (Stewart, 2006a) draws upon this tradition to provide a reading experience that encourages the reader-participant to question the conventional relationship established between being at home and being ones self.

The exploration of this meditation begins with an enigmatic quote from ‘Art and Answerability’:-

"For in order to live and act, I need to be unconsummated...I have to be, for myself, someone who is axiologically yet-to-be..." (Bakhtin, 1990a:13)

The title and the initial visual design features of ‘The Box’ (a rectangular box placed at the centre of the screen) explore this quote by making a reference to an old cliché about creative thinking, namely that creative change is brought about by thinking ‘outside the box’.

The main screen presents the text fragment ‘To Move’. This fragment serves two purposes: it serves as an introduction to the text (the starting point of multiple texts, in fact), it also provides an explanation of how this text is to be negotiated; as the reader-participant is required to move this first lexia outside the box before the next section of text is revealed. Furthermore, having discovered that they need to make this first move they soon realize that the lexia ‘To Move’ is a general instruction for negotiating this meditation (as they will also have to repeat the process of ‘move and reveal’ with each subsequent lexia they encounter).

In the early development phase, the text for ‘The Box’ had an optimistic tone (which I described in my notes as a ‘hymn to change’). However, the later design phases were important for the development of the final form and content of this piece.

The process of de-bugging involved me in navigating this text, time after time, clicking and moving the text to test the consequences of minor changes in the coding of the piece. This felt like an unending task at the time, whose actions reminded me of bailing out water from a leaky boat.

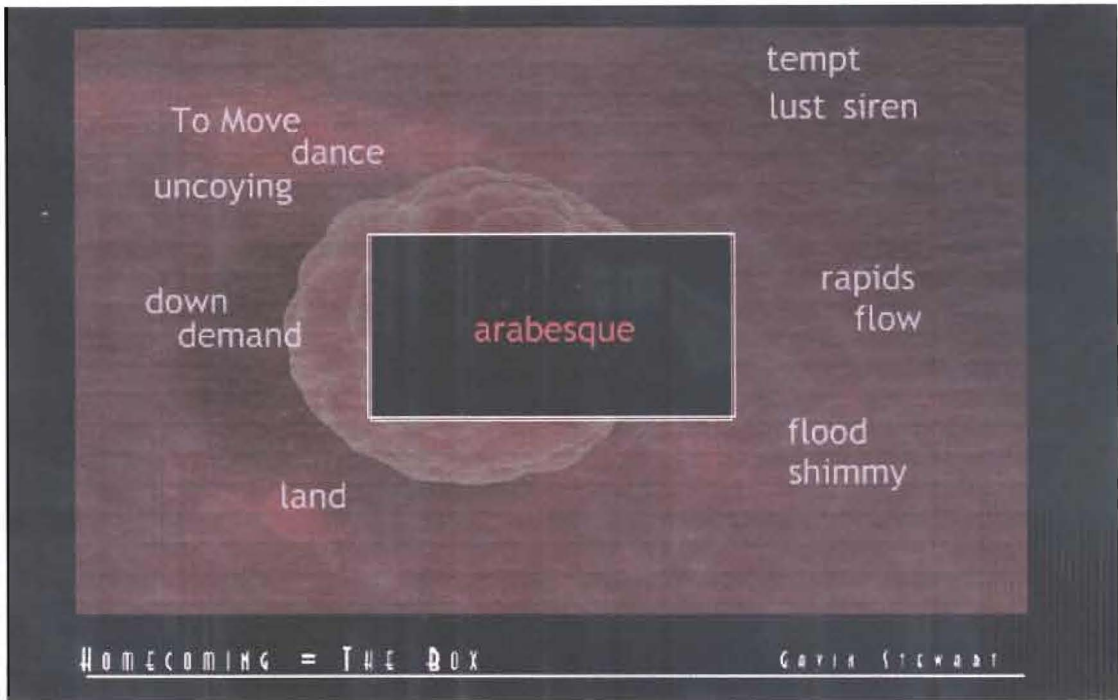


Figure 8 - Screen Shot of 'The Box' from Homecoming by Gavin Stewart

This experience of design talk-back was something of an epiphany for me because it made me realize some of the implications of being an unconsummated self (and a reader-participant of this text). For although Bakhtin described an exhilarating, creative notion of being; he also described a relentlessly exhausting one, in which there is no safe place or resting point. In this model, consciousness is forced to think thought after thought, to embrace homecoming after homecoming, so that the self is fated to be in a constant state of reconfiguration. It is easy, therefore, in considering this kind of existence, to develop a sense of nostalgia for anything that appears

unquestioned or unchanging. This experience convinced me, therefore, to extend the recorded text to introduce a note of ambiguity. Two further section were added that made reference to the torture of Sisyphus, to reflect my growing sense of unease at the prospect of the endless change wrought by an infinite number of homecoming festivals.

Serendipity also played a role in the final form of 'The Box', for having embraced the implications of this talk-back experience, I realized that I did not need to integrate these new sections of text into the linear form established by my original text segments. The existing design of the piece made it possible to follow multiple text loops from the initial drag action. The final implementation of 'The Box', therefore, makes use of this ability to map the reader-participant's point of release to reveal a multiplicity of text. In doing so, it fits with the overall design aim of 'Homecoming' by addressing the reader-participant with a choice - between positioning the initial 'To Move' in different parts of the screen and between the different and somewhat incompatible notions of creative change played out in the textual strands of 'The Box'.

### **5.2.3 Choreographer: Locating Home**

'Choreographer' (Stewart, 2006b) also draws on the relationship between home and the self noted in 5.2.2 above. However, in contrast with 'The Box' this meditation approaches the theme of home through a discussion of the role of the body in contemporary notions of the self.



The piece begins with a quote from Bakhtin in which he introduces his notion of the “open body” (Bakhtin, 1984b:20) - a concept that plays an important role in his understanding of participation and carnival. ‘Choreographer’ plays with this idea to explore the fluidity of the focus of consciousness. In doing so, it also encourages the reader-participant to challenge their ideas about the extent of self, its relationship to the body and the manner in which the focus of consciousness can be shifted by outside influences and controls.

The main screen of this meditation begins with the central image of a dancer and a key question – “How big is your soul?”. The meditation is initiated when the reader-participant selects this question. ‘Choreographer’ then provides them with an opportunity to explore this question, by clicking and dragging the pink ‘question mark’ image about the screen.



Figure 9 - Screen Shot of ‘Choreographer’ from ‘Homecoming’ by Gavin Stewart

A brief exploration of this functionality reveals that elements in the voice recording associated with this action change as the reader-participant moves this image. Further exploration reveals that moving this image further from the centre of the screen ‘moves’ the metaphors and similes (provided by the voice recordings) further from the bodily locus; so that, for example, they change from images of organs to images of limbs and then onto images associated with locations outside the body.

Other elements in the interface also allow the reader-participant to explore the quote presented at the beginning of ‘Choreographer’. For example, the circular elements that surround the dancer image also serve as buttons, that allow the reader-participant to change the colour of the background of the dancer image. However, the reader-participant may discover, in due course, that these ‘colour’ selections also make changes in the voice recordings; providing the reader-participant with an opportunity to explore an ever more ambiguous relationship between the self and the body. This text reveals a series of words that vary from simple instructions (such as ‘Leap’, ‘Hop’, ‘Skip’, ‘Spin’ etc.) to more sinister terms that draw attention to the power relations implied by the choreographer/dancer metaphor explored in this piece. A further level of textual ambiguity is introduced when they discover that they can reveal the image elements underneath the central image of the dancer.

### 5.2.4 M/other: The Origins of the Speaking Self

The meditation 'M/other' (Stewart, 2006f) explores a possible origin of the self, in the self/other relationship, by providing the reader-participant with an opportunity to model the notion of the 'gift of the other' (discussed in 2.2.5).

This meditation takes, as its starting point, the idea presented in 'From Notes Made in 1970-71' (Bakhtin, 1986d:138) that consciousness comes into being inside another consciousness. It provides an opportunity to explore Bakhtin's idea with a text that draws on the recipient's view of the 'gift' being offered by the m/other.

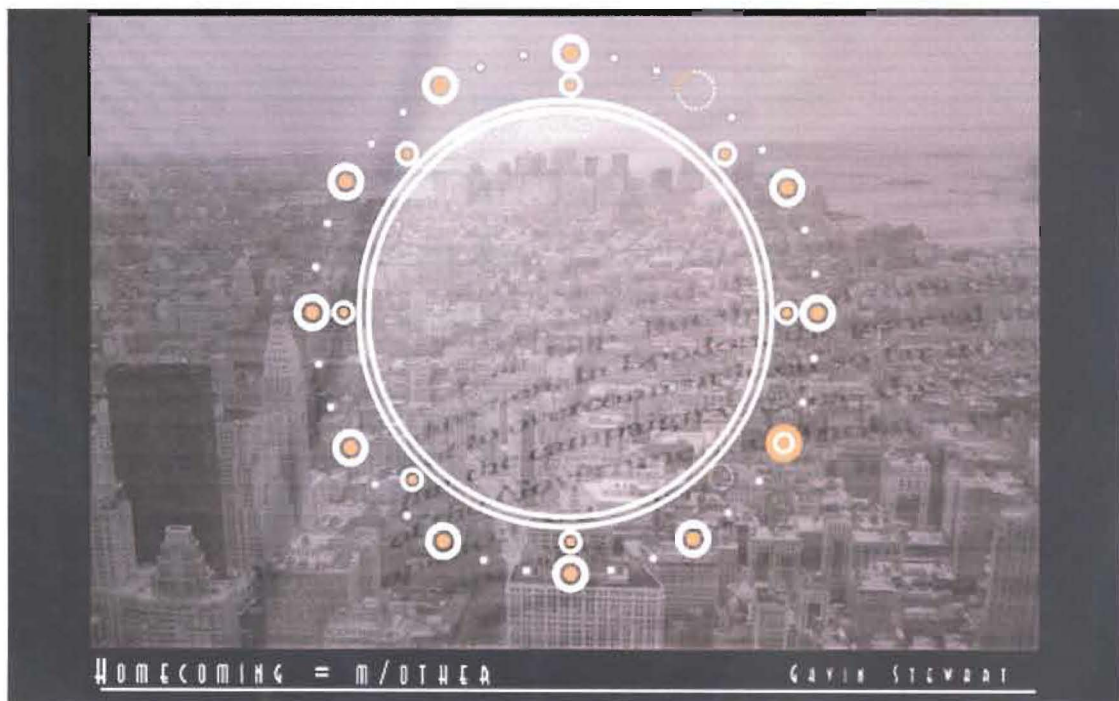


Figure 10 - Screen Shot of 'Mother' from 'Homecoming' by Gavin Stewart

The meditation begins with a voice recording - "All is pain and you offer me...". On the screen, the reader-participant is presented with two text buttons, one marked 'love' the other marked 'pain'. These buttons present the reader-participant with a choice which they will have to act on before this meditation will progress further. Having made their choice, the voice recording text proceeds to the next recorded segment so that the reader-participant is able to progress to other 'choices', between cold and warmth, for example, in the same manner. Simultaneous to this progression, the reader-participant is presented with an animated mosaic made up of images of mothers with their children. The positioning of this mosaic in the centre of the screen is designed to provide a visual clue to the relationship being explored in the text. It is also designed to provide an opportunity to trigger a series of roll-over effects which repeat voice recordings of the words 'mother' and 'love'.

Like many of the other meditations that make up 'Homecoming', 'M/other' is designed to take the form of an endless recurring loop which permits the reader-participant to participate in a series of non-identical returns (the visual design of this phase of the meditation is structured as series of circular elements so that it also reflects this theme). In the second phase of this meditation it returns to the initial voice recording - "All is pain and you offer me pain". However, instead of the 'love' and 'pain' buttons, the reader-participant is now presented with a series of circular buttons that can be selected to manipulate the order of the reading and to reveal recordings of other longer segments of text. These segments present the reader-participant with a series of juxtapositions that can be used to explore the themes being played out in the wider loop. By selecting the button associated with the notion of 'a gift', for example, they can access a short text that discusses the role of gifts in

- the myth of the fall of Troy. The City of Troy was introduced into this piece because this myth makes for an interesting, if somewhat ambiguous comparison with the process of gaining language (mainly because the Trojans participated in the events that led to their downfall).

### **5.2.5 Underground: Changing Lines**

Bakhtin was not the only twentieth century thinker to be interested in the self and subjectivity. Peter Barry, for example, maintained that post-structuralist thinkers described a ‘dissolved’ or ‘constructed’ self, so that “what we may think of as an individual is really a product of social and linguistic forces” (Barry, 1995:65). The meditation ‘Underground’ (Stewart, 2006h) parodies the language of this wider debate about the nature of subjectivity to provide the reader-participant with an opportunity to reach beneath the surface of the word ‘self’ and to explore a number of different perspectives on this debate.

‘Underground’ makes a metaphorical connection between the self and the bustling dynamism of a modern metropolis. It begins with a series of sound effects that suggest a city setting. ‘Underground’ then reveals a visual interface modelled on an underground railway map to provide an opportunity to explore aspects of the city of self.

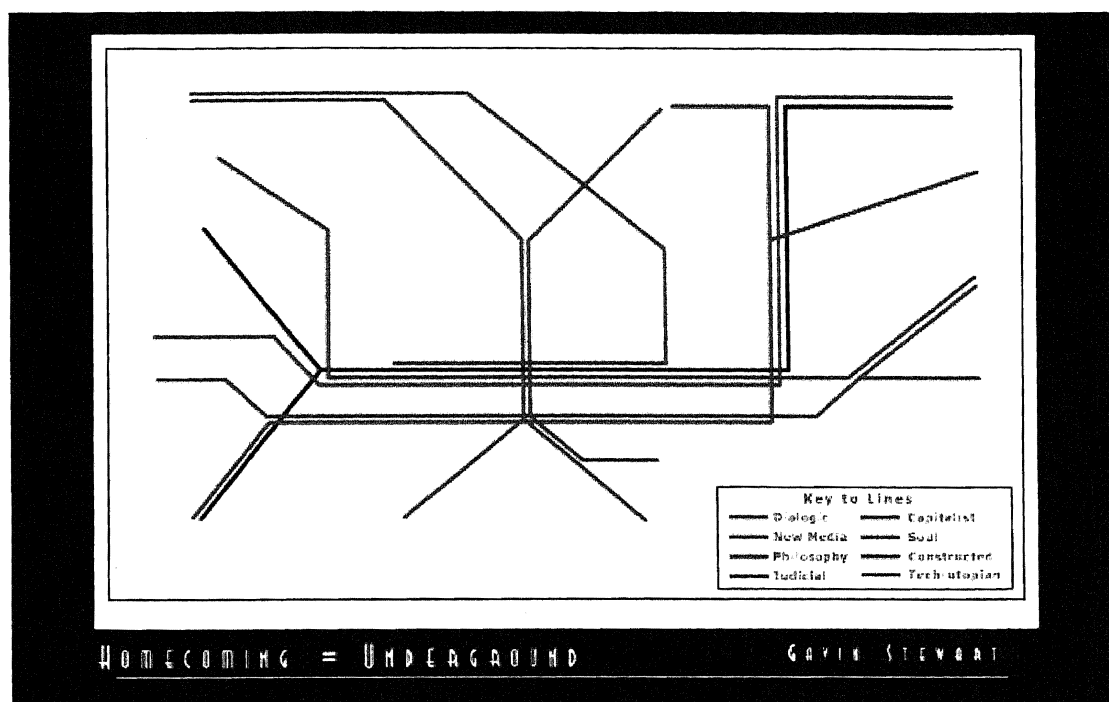


Figure 11 - Screen Shot of 'Underground' from 'Homecoming' by Gavin Stewart

An initial exploration by the reader-participant of the underground map reveals a series of roll-over effects that trigger a series of sound effects and the colours of the individual lines. Further investigation of this map reveals that each line within this map is also a button which can provide a series of voice recordings. The selection of the 'constructed' line, for example, reveals the voice recording "I is a city/false pattern in lights".

The reader-participant can also discover that the key to the underground map also provides an opportunity to manipulate the voice recordings revealed by this meditation. These key buttons reveal a series of texts which can be manipulated to create a series of concatenations between the different lines of thought about the nature of self.

One of the additional design objectives developed during the production of this meditation was to provide an experience that challenged the adequacy of a theoretical 'line' to provide an account of the experience of selfhood. The metaphor of the city was deployed, therefore, because the sheer scale and multiplicity of a city defies easy overarching description. However, the initial talk-back from early iterations of this meditation revealed that the original project design lacked the necessary bustle of a city to manifest this aim effectively. Later iterations of 'Underground', therefore, like a number of the other meditations that make up 'Homecoming', feature a number of hidden roll-over effects. These buttons are areas of the screen that trigger an effect without providing a visual clue to their location within the interface. The effect of this change is that the reader-participant is provided with an experience that invokes the ambient energy of a city, that can be manipulated, but without providing an overwhelming sense of agency.

#### **5.2.6 Moon Road: Feeling at Home with the Self/Other**

In contrast to 'Underground', 'Moon Road' (Stewart, 2006g) is a quiet, lyrical meditation that offers the reader-participant the opportunity to dwell on their contribution, as an observer-participant, to the beauty of a natural scene. It begins with a quote from Bakhtin:

"It is only from my unique place that the meaning of the ongoing event can become clearer, and the more intensely I become rooted in that place, the clearer that meaning becomes." (Bakhtin, 1990b: 129)

The visual design of this meditation focuses on an image of the moon reflected in water. The ‘moon road’, which provides the title for this piece, is the short-lived pathway of reflected light that runs from the moon across the top of the water to the observer. It serves in this piece both as a symbol of short-lived duration of the aesthetic event and also as a metaphor for connection between the reader-participant and the text they are exploring.

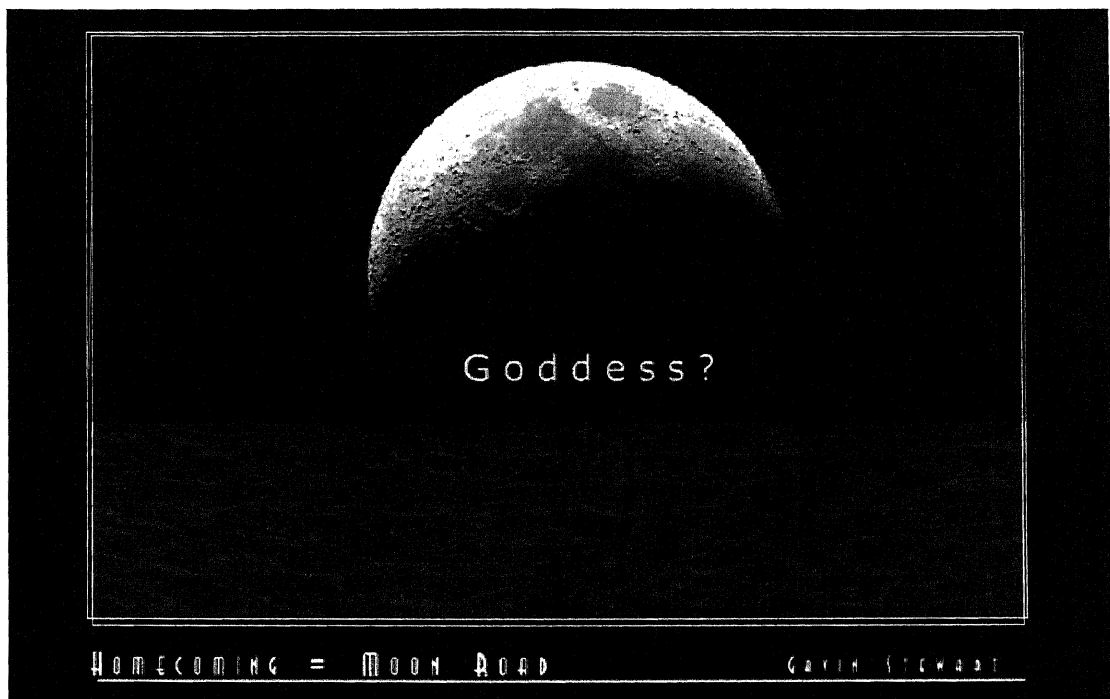


Figure 12 - Screen Shot from 'Moon Road' from 'Homecoming' by Gavin Stewart

The piece begins with an animated text fragment (which also serves as a button) emerging above the water in the centre of the image. This is then followed by a voice recording which begins “You call me *O Goddess*”. The reader-participant is encouraged to associate this voice with the moon-deity. The subsequent lines of this meditation challenge the hierarchy established in this relationship by noting “I yearn your frail skins”. The voice recording proceeds without interruption until the images



of the moon and its moon-path fade. It is, however, possible for the reader-participant to return the meditation to its earlier phases simply by moving the mouse over the goddess-name buttons positioned in the dark regions of the moon-path image.

The design of this section of the meditation invites the reader-participant to remove the darkness and to ‘make’ the moon-path between themselves and the moon; to illuminate this metaphor of beauty. In doing so, they are also asked to question the relationship between the admired and the admirer.

‘Moon Road’ is different from many of the other meditations in ‘Homecoming’ because it is structured not to produce an endless loop. The end of this meditation, therefore, presented an interesting design challenge in that it needed to reach some deliberate point of closure. It is possible, for example, for the reader-participant to illuminate most of the moon-path in the image of this piece. However, this illumination is short-lived, as this piece is designed to return to darkness. This design element seemed incongruous when I first introduced this solution during the early design phase of this piece. This was mainly because Bakhtin provided an open-ended, on-going view of the world. However, this fade was eventually kept as a deliberate challenge to Bakhtin’s positive world-view; to recognize that the individual event of meaning-making is fragile and finite.

### **5.2.7 Guidance Notes for a Young River: Coming Home**

The ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, is often quoted as saying that ‘you can not step into the same river twice’. This aphorism is widely understood to mean that everything is subject to change. This transitory notion of existence appears in the work of Bakhtin too. In the essay ‘Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel’, for example, he noted:-

“The present is something transitory, it is flow, it is an eternal continuation without beginning or end” (Bakhtin, 1981b:20)

The meditation ‘Guidance Notes for a Young River’ (Stewart, 2006d) explores Bakhtin’s ideas of ‘being’ through the metaphor of a river, by providing the reader-participant with an opportunity to explore some of the consequences of endless flow.

The interface to ‘Guidance Notes for a Young River’ comprises a central image of a drop of water and a series of twenty buttons, in the form of endlessly changing images of rivers (distributed evenly either side of the central image). The main ‘flow’ of text is through a voice-recording which begins with metaphors based on the source of the river and which flows through the life of the river to metaphors that deal with the river meeting the sea (before looping back to the beginning again). Each pass through this voice-recording is unique as each element in the loop is randomly selected from a range of options. Similarly, the river images constantly change on a random basis.

The reader-participant can also modify the flow of the elements in this piece by selecting the verses that will be specifically included in the loop. This piece,

therefore, provides the reader-participant with an opportunity to step into the flow of this ever-changing river.

The structure and text of 'Guidance Notes for a Young River', however, also question the absence of terminal points such as birth and death in the endlessly open-ended model described by Bakhtin. It does this by focusing on the relationship between the river and the sea (and between the drop of water and the image of the old woman revealed by participating in the text). The sea marks both a place of rest and return (a homecoming for the water of the river) but it also marks a place of age, wisdom, death and obliteration.

The flexibility of this text facilitates the production of different interpretations of this return to the sea. In one possible ending it is seen as a consummation or "marriage to the hallowed horizon" while in another it is seen as destruction in "the waves that will drown all tears". The reader-participant is encouraged to interpret the various versions of this text as stable elements in the flow by selecting individual lines that are then repeated in the next loop of the voice recording. However, they are also made aware that they do not have agency over this meditation, as these verses are modified in the next loop.

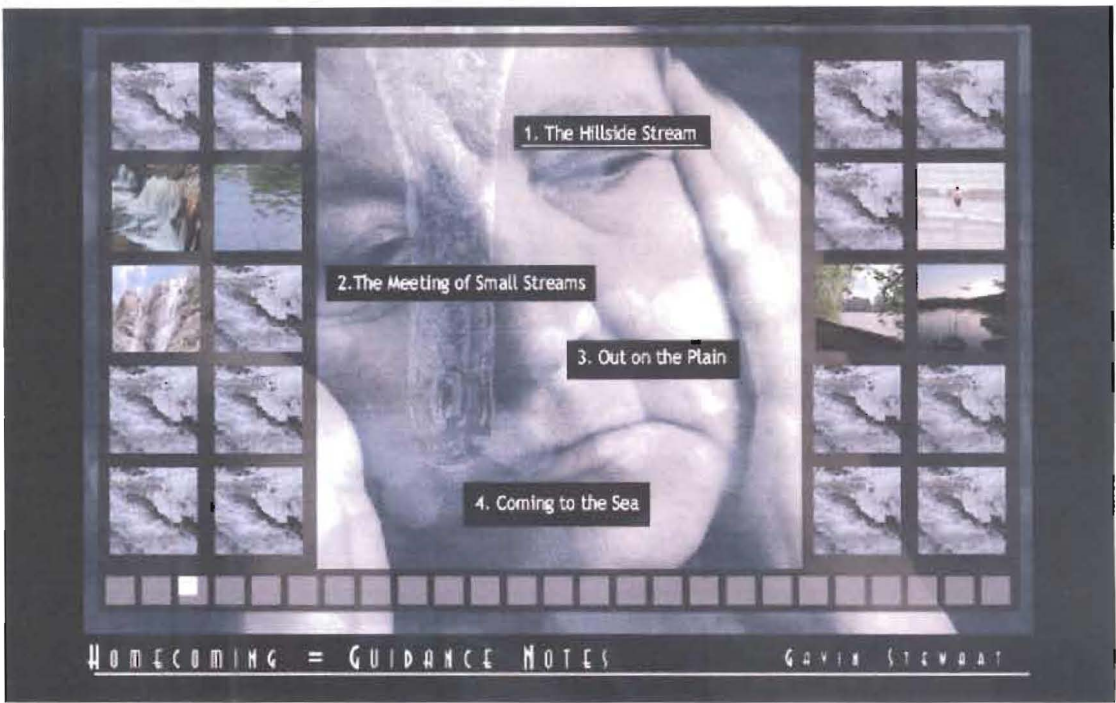


Figure 13 - Screen Shot of 'Guidance Notes' from 'Homecoming' by Gavin Stewart

The design of this meditation, therefore, also provides a comment on the oracular quality of Heraclitus’ aphorism, by drawing attention to some of the implications of never being able to step into the same text twice. In doing so, it aims to draw the reader-participant’s attention to the ephemeral quality of the event of meaning-making.

5.2.8 Gross: The Excessive in the Festive

The meditation ‘Gross’ (Stewart, 2006c) also explores the event of meaning-making by exploiting a pun on the word ‘Gross’.

Bakhtin had a strikingly positive view of the excessive. In sections dealing with grotesque realism in *Rabelais and his World*, for example, he argued that its

exaggerations have “a positive, assertive character” which provided bodily images of “fertility, growth, and a brimming over abundance.”(Bakhtin, 1984b:18). Similarly, in the essay ‘Art and Answerability’, he argued for the importance of an ‘excess of seeing’ as the basis of his concept of uniqueness (Bakhtin, 1990c:23). This meditation, however, challenges some of this evaluation by providing the reader-participant with an opportunity to explore a textual pun that flips from brimming abundance to bewildering excess.

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines the word ‘gross’ as “luxurious, rank, overfed, and repulsively fat” (COED, 1976:473). It also notes that a ‘gross’ is a traditional English term for a dozen dozens. The design of ‘Gross’ makes a visual and verbal link between these two definitions by moving from one definition of the term to the other in the course of a reading.

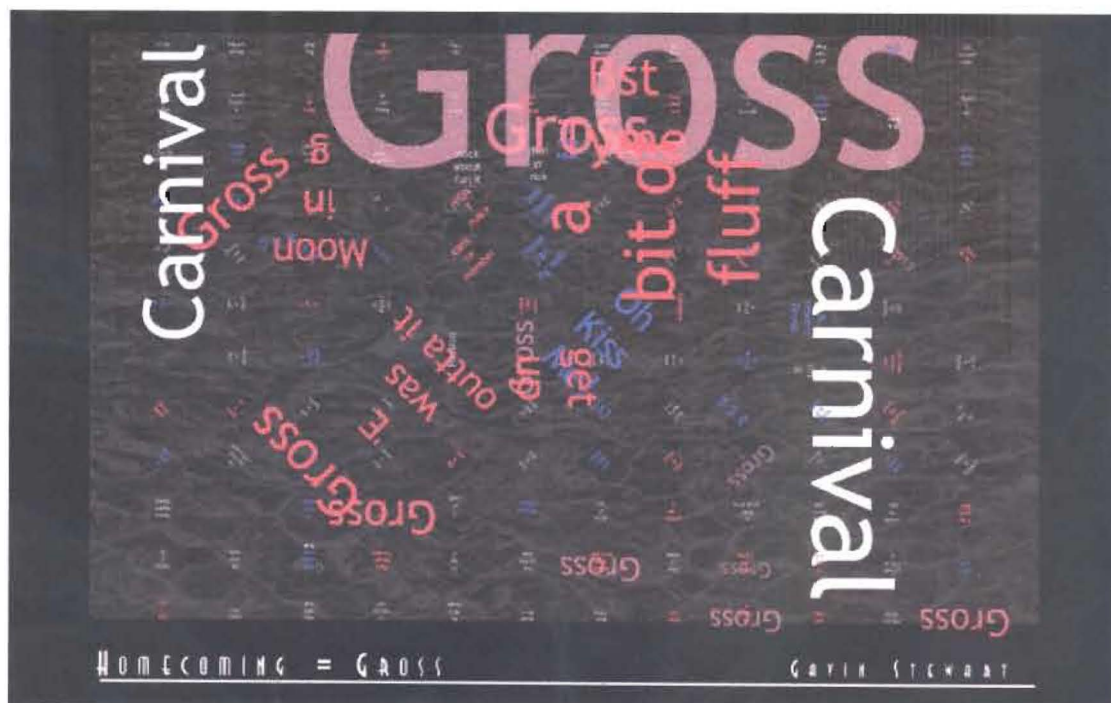


Figure 14 - Screen Shot of 'Gross' from 'Homecoming' by Gavin Stewart

The main body of the text begins by presenting 144 white squares. Clicking on any one of these squares reveals a textual fragment that can be manipulated by the reader-participant. When first encountered, these texts are extremely small and are not normally legible with the naked eye. However, by clicking on the lexia the reader-participant can, eventually, make them large enough to read. The act of clicking simultaneously makes the voice recording of these fragments audible.

At first, 'Gross' encourages its reader-participant to have a sense of agency over its activities. They can enlarge a single text fragment and then watch it decay in size. They can also select different fragments simultaneously and investigate poetic associations between them. However, after further manipulation of the fragments, a point is reached whereby the text rapidly descends into a chaotic state in which the individual voice recordings overlap with each other. Furthermore, the voice-recordings with sexist and violent imagery begin to dominate. The result is a rising sense of rancour and disagreement, both between the audible elements and between the audible and visual elements presented. The descent into chaos is then completed when text fragments begin to randomly select the word 'gross' to be enlarged automatically. The text will then loop infinitely, producing a series of aleatorically-generated effects.

### 5.2.9 Understanding: Downloader as Metaphor

The meditation ‘Understanding’ (Stewart, 2006i) addresses the theme of participation in the event of meaning-making through the metaphor of downloading a file from the Internet. It uses this metaphor to provide the reader-participant with an opportunity to investigate both the Bakhtin Circle’s notions of responsive understanding as well as other models of communication that regard understanding as the simple transfer of knowledge from a sender to a receiver.

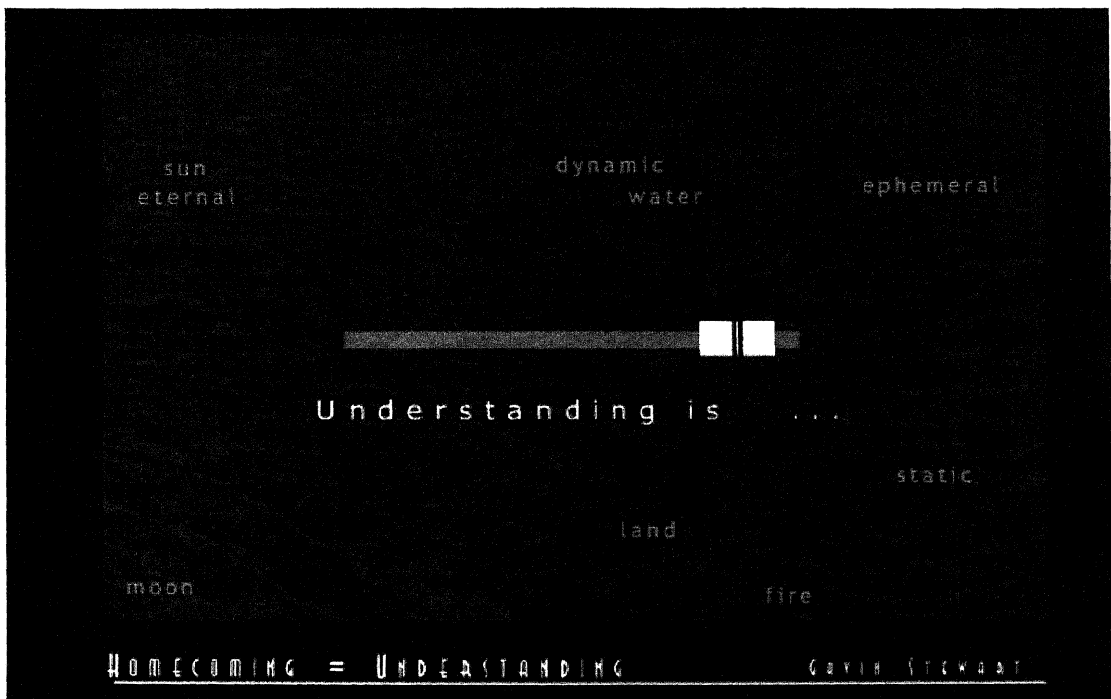
‘Understanding’ begins with the same introductory elements that feature in all the meditations that make up ‘Homecoming’. The quote from Bakhtin reads:-

“A passive understanding of linguistic meaning is no understanding at all” (Bakhtin, 1981a:281)

However, rather than removing the downloader graphic from the screen at the end of the introductory section, this meditation then foregrounds this graphic by moving it to the centre of the screen.

By moving the mouse over the screen, the reader-participant comes to realize that the text is negotiated by the manipulation of the central downloader slider graphic. Over time the reader-participant then comes to realise that the percentage of understanding reported by this meditation will rise if they click and drag the slider and that it will fall (over time) if they do not move the slider.

The actions of the reader-participant also introduce a series of white square buttons (noted in 5.2.1). These buttons provide the reader-participant with further opportunities to investigate the themes played out in the meditation by introducing a series of texts (such as 'White Square', described below) that discuss the nature of their participation in the events taking place on the screen.



*Figure 15 - Screen Shot of 'Understanding' from 'Homecoming' by Gavin Stewart*

This additional aspect of design of this piece provides a commentary on the experience of the relationship between time and understanding. Its intention is to suggest that it is possible, with time, to gain understanding. It is also possible to lose that understanding through the passage of time.



### 5.2.10 Homecoming: Recursion and Reflexivity

‘Homecoming’ is designed to be a single piece. It is provided with a number of themes and metaphorical associations that connect the individual meditations together. The theme of temporality, discussed in the last section, appears in a number of other meditations. In ‘Underground’, for example, the phenomenological line argues “I is a City/ the canton of time”. Similarly the theme of prodigality, which is first raised in the introduction, is also alluded to through the themes of excess in ‘Gross’ and the theme of return in ‘Guidance Notes for a Young River’. There are also a number of specific allusions (to rivers, to the act of dancing etc.) that encourage the reader-participant to make associative leaps between the different meditations.

These associative metaphors are designed to be open-ended, to encourage the reader-participant to engage with each meditation more than once. This is important for the overall design aim of this piece because their re-engagement with each meditation is intended to draw attention to the contingent nature of their first encounter. This aim is supported by the design of the introduction that provides hypertextual links to the individual meditations that have been selected. It is further supported by the introduction of links within each meditation that encourage the reader-participant to leap from meditation to meditation so that they encounter each meditation time and again in a recursive manner.

The meditations that make up 'Homecoming' are also drawn together into a single experience by the reflexive elements that both comment on, and develop, the initial design objectives of this piece. The sub-meditation 'White Square' (Stewart, 2006i), in particular, provides a commentary on the themes developed across 'Homecoming'. For example, in this sub-meditation they are presented with the question – "How many questions have you been asked today?", followed by the question - "How many of them have you been able to answer?".

### **5.3 An Awareness of Participation in the Wider World: Design Talk-back**

The first design objective for 'Homecoming' was to produce a work of art that illuminated the aesthetic described by this thesis. This thesis argues that the design process described in Section 5.2 illuminates how this piece realises this objective. The second design objective was to investigate, through practice, the relationship between the awareness of participation in a particular act of meaning-making with the wider consciousness discussed in sections 3.4 and 3.5. Experience gained through the design and reading of 'Homecoming' suggests a relationship similar to the one described by Ken Hirschkop between novelistic discourse and pluralistic consciousness ( see the discussion in Section 2.5 & 2.6). Furthermore, design talk-back from this practice experience provides a hint that the scope of the particular awareness engendered beyond the work is dependent upon the reader-participant's engagement with the metaphorical dimensions of the work.

In Chapter Two, this thesis noted that Ken Hirschkop provided a non-idealised, historicist account of heteroglossia, describing it as cultural tendency predicated on a myriad of historical encounters rather than an idealised condition. Furthermore it noted that this cultural tendency was in dynamic opposition with other, monologic, counter-tendencies. This thesis argues that consciousness of participation in the event of meaning-making (that forms the cornerstone of the aesthetic arguments made by this thesis) can be conceptualised in the same manner, so that a wider consciousness of participation in the event of meaning-making can be conceived of as a cultural tendency engendered by a myriad of events (such as the reading

‘Homecoming’) and subject to counter-tendencies (such as those described in the critique of the ‘price of print’ in Chapter Two) which work in opposition to the development of this consciousness.

This thesis, therefore, takes a non-idealised view of awareness of participation in the event of meaning-making. My experiences of ‘Homecoming’ (not only as an author-participant but also as a reader-participant) provide ample evidence that reading this text does not result in a permanent, universal awareness of participation in meaning-making. Similarly, my experiences in researching and developing this work also suggests that the sense of awareness of participation (raised in the reader-participant) is subject to strong cultural counter-forces that seek to hide the ‘participative’ aspect of meaning-making. Furthermore, my experience of design talk-back while developing this work also suggests that the scope of the reader-participant’s awareness of participation in the wider world is strongly influenced by the extent of their unique, dialogic engagement with the imagery of this piece.

In the text known as ‘Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art’. Bakhtin observed:-

"It is impossible to isolate some real moment in a work of art that would be pure content, just as there is not pure form either: content and form interpenetrate, they are inseparable." (Bakhtin, 1990c:283)

The design talk-back from ‘Homecoming’ indicates that Bakhtin’s argument applies to its addressivity too. The overall experience of these meditations (and the way that

this experience relates to the reader-participant's world) is dependent upon the reader-participant's specific engagement with the symbols and images, as well as their ability to manipulate them in some manner. In designing 'Moon Road', for example, my experience of deploying the image of the moon indicated that it could serve for me both as an object of beauty and a symbol of beauty. Furthermore, I came to realise during this design task that my own awareness of participation (gained through engaging with this evolving image) had become associated metaphorically with my ideas of beauty (reaching beyond this immediate image of the moon). The final design of Homecoming', therefore, features an extensive range of poetic symbols (the city, the river, the moon), metaphors and images to encourage a broad, associative identification between the themes addressed by this work and the wider world.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusions**

### **6.1 Argument for the Hypothesis**

This thesis began by describing the contemporary controversy surrounding the aesthetics of computer-mediated textual art. It responded to this controversy by proposing the hypothesis that some of these texts had aesthetic value within the context of contemporary Western culture and that this value lay in the sense of awareness of participating in an event of meaning-making that the addressivity of these texts engender in their reader-participants.

This thesis then posed three subsidiary questions, which provided the focus for the research project reported by this thesis:-

- What role does materiality play in the formation of this aesthetic?
- What role does participation play in the formation of this aesthetic?
- What role do earlier claims for emancipation play in formation of this aesthetic?

In answering these research questions, this thesis turned to the work of the Bakhtin Circle and Mikhail Bakhtin to describe meaning-making as a unique socially- and materially-constructed event between reciprocating individuals, spatially and temporally defined by the addressivity of their specific utterance. It argued that participation in meaning-making is, therefore, a ubiquitous condition and not a special situation, unique to computer-mediated textual art. It then argued for the

concept of addressivity as a way to understand the role played by materiality in discourse. This thesis then drew on the work of Ken Hirschkop to argue that the reduction in reciprocity and unequal reach and force of print-mediated utterances had contributed to the obscuring of participation in the act of meaning-making in the modern period.

Chapter Three then extended this model to argue that a sub-set of computer-mediated textual art demonstrated a mode of addressivity that was significantly different from the norms of print culture. It used this mode of address to describe a non-idealised, social and historical aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art. It argued against the primacy of the material in its discussion of aesthetic objects, by arguing that the materiality of networked computers was a viable form of *facilitation*, rather than a direct cause of the mode of address, valued by this thesis. It critiqued other emancipatory claims, such as for readerly empowerment, made for computer-mediated textual art. It then provided an original axiology of computer-mediated textual art, predicated on a mode of address facilitated by network computers, rather than the materiality of network computers themselves. Chapter Three concluded by arguing that any work of art (computer-mediated textual art or otherwise) that raises their reader-participant's awareness of their participation in the act of meaning-making is of value, within the context of contemporary Western culture, because this awareness serves as a corrective to the 'price of print'.

Chapter Four set out how a practice-based methodology was employed within this research program. It described a 'contingent' model of practice based on the model

of meaning-making established in Chapters Two and Three. It then described the epistemological limits to the methodology employed in this research programme. Chapter Five then illuminated the general axiology described in this thesis by providing examples drawn from my own design process. The results of this practice argue that the fluidity of internet-mediated, multimedia, computer-mediated textual art makes it a suitable form with which to realise an aesthetic object which deploys a mode of address that acts as a corrective to the 'price of print'.

This thesis concludes, therefore, that its hypothesis has been upheld.

However, in reaching this conclusion the details of the arguments presented by this thesis provide a number of important ramifications for the aesthetics of these texts, some of which serve as the basis for further work in this area.



## 6.2 An Aesthetic amongst Many: An Appreciation of the Wider Context

### 6.2.1 Addressivity, Immersion and Heteroglossia

In the novel, *The Houses of the Dead*, Bakhtin's favoured novelist Dostoyevsky served up a blunt warning for any theorist seeking to draw sweeping conclusions. He noted:

"Reality is infinitely various when compared to the deductions of abstract thought." (Dostoyevsky, 1985:305)

This thesis has been careful, therefore, to use the indefinite article to describe its subject, that is to say, it describes *an* aesthetic of computer-mediated textual art. It does this partly in response to this warning but also in response to some words of wisdom passed on by Wayne Booth. Booth noted in the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* that he had considered changing its title to the indefinite article to avoid the charge of over-generalising. He forced his point home by suggesting that a more modest subtitle for his classic work might be: -

"Some notes toward an Introduction to a Possible Way of Viewing  
One Aspect of the Many Rhetorical Dimensions of Narrative, with  
Special Emphasis on Some Limited Kinds of Fiction" (Booth,  
1991:402)

By its own arguments this thesis needs to be wary of reductive analysis and generalizations. It is fully aware that it can only provide a possible way of viewing one of the many rhetorical dimensions of computer-mediated textual art. Hence this thesis describes *an* aesthetic, a particular approach to its object of study which is clearly constructed to be regarded as one amongst many. It is important to recognize, therefore, that it does not provide an exclusive or exhaustive description of these texts.

The issue of exclusivity is of particular importance. The arguments presented by this thesis do not suggest that the facility to raise awareness of participation is an exclusive property of 'Homecoming' or indeed computer-mediated textual art. Similarly, the arguments presented in this thesis do not suggest that works of art that raise awareness of participation should supersede works of art, such as novels, plays, films and television, that provide experiences of heteroglossia. In fact, the arguments presented by this thesis suggest that both novelistic discourse and an awareness of participation are required for the inter-subjective consciousness described by Bakhtin and Hirschkop.

This thesis, therefore, does not trumpet 'the end of books' or the 'death of the novel'. Instead it argues the case for a particular type of address that is to be valued only if it is situated amongst a rich diversity of other forms (all of which are required to realize the intersubjective consciousness described by Bakhtin and Hirschkop).

This thesis, similarly, does not present any argument to support the notion that it is desirable to 'bolt-on' the mode of address described by this thesis to pre-existing

practice. Furthermore, it does not argue that the recognition of the mode of address described by this thesis will mark anything like a ‘natural’ progression from traditional to participatory forms of work. It is clear, from the controversy presented at the beginning of this thesis, that the relationships between traditional aesthetics such as immersion and narrative, and the aesthetics of computer-mediated works are more convoluted than was theorized by earlier pioneers in this area. Marie-Laure Ryan, for example, concluded recently that:-

“For interactivity to be reconciled with immersion, it must be stripped of any self-reflexive dimension” (Ryan, 2001:284)

Ryan’s argument suggests that it might be difficult (undesirable or even impossible) to produce an awareness of heteroglossia and participation in meaning-making at the same time. These arguments and the ones presented by this thesis suggest that the specific details of the relationship between addressivity, immersion and heteroglossia will be a fruitful area to explore in further research and practice

### **6.2.2 Addressivity, Cultural and Literary Theory: The Devil and the Detail**

It is something of an irony that Bakhtin (a philosopher fascinated by the uniqueness of being) is often criticised for a lack of detail. Caryl Emerson, for example, argued that he is indifferent to the details of how ‘good’ is to be enforced in his moral philosophy (Emerson, 1997:218). Similarly, Ken Hirshkop observed that Bakhtin does not discuss the details of the novels of Dostoyevsky (Hirshkop, 1999:14). It is certainly the case that the enormous historic sweep of his work on novelistic

discourse meant that he provided a high-level description of the phenomenon rather than a 'close reading', so that he evaluated heteroglossia in general rather than in specific terms in his work.

It was the stated aim of this thesis to describe an axiology (a theory of value) of computer-mediated textual art. It has, therefore, approached its aesthetic object through an architectonic method similar to the one adopted by Bakhtin. However, in formulating its theory of value in this sweeping manner it is important to acknowledge that it has yet to engage in detail with a number of the semiotic 'devils' that lie in the detail of these fascinating works. The arguments presented by this thesis are, therefore, not exhaustive.

My experience in deploying alphabetic text, sound, image, animation and colour within my practice has given me renewed respect for practitioners of poetry, photography, music, sound-art and animation. Furthermore, this respect does not just extend to the technical aspects of these disciplines, but also to the aesthetic discourses of these subjects as well.

It is important to note, therefore, that the discussion at the end of Chapter Five suggests that the aesthetic described by this thesis does not in any way supersede or replace the established interests of artistic, literary and cultural theory. Issues such as the representation of gender, sexuality and class (both visually and semantically) still inform the addressivity of computer-mediated textual art. In fact, experiences when demonstrating pieces, such as 'Choice/cuts' and 'Homecoming', indicate a relationship between the reception of their content and the degree and manner in

which the reader-participant becomes aware of the participation in wider events of meaning-making. The reception of these pieces further suggests that there is a rhetorical relationship between addressivity and representation that will be a fruitful area to explore further.

### 6.3 E-xpectances: A Bright Future for Computer-mediated Textual Art?

Writing in 2001, Mare-Laure Ryan, observed that:-

“The question is not whether computer technology can offer a new artistic experience but how badly society wants it” (Ryan, 2001:331)

These words still resonate, mainly because the audience for these kinds of works is still minute. This is significant because the mere availability of works like ‘Homecoming’ will not bring about the necessary change. The aesthetic described by this thesis is predicated upon a change in consciousness based upon a significant number of reader-participants having a number of experiences of participation in meaning-making. Furthermore, this observation is pertinent because within a capitalist economy this lack of audience is equated with a lack of a market, which in turn means that there are limited economic opportunities to develop and distribute these kinds of works. There is very little evidence to suggest that this situation might change dramatically in the foreseeable future.

There are several reasons, therefore, to suppose that the change in consciousness described by this thesis might take some time to occur (or not occur at all). The history of the novel, for example, suggests that the acceptance of a new genre can take a very long time. Bakhtin, for instance, traced the evolution of the novel from the Menippean satires (Bakhtin, 1981b:26). It is important to recognize that, despite this lengthy cultural pedigree, prose continued to be a lowly form for most of that time. Henry Fielding, for example, writing some seventeen hundred years after the

Menippean Satires, still felt the need to defend his use of prose in his prologue to *Joseph Andrews* (Fielding, 1977:25). Similarly, there is no reason to suppose that computer-mediated textual art is destined to contribute to a great cultural change simply because the novel did.

The recent history of hypertext criticism demonstrates that there is a need to avoid making unsustainable claims. Back in 1996, Ilana Snyder noted that hypertext fiction was often discussed in a “celebratory if not hyperbolic manner” in which hypertext was praised as “an evolutionary step towards a perfect communication technology” (Snyder, 1996:x). Writing just eight years later, Donna Leishman recorded a reaction to this hyperbole by arguing that these works had not “significantly altered society's perception of how narrative can be consumed” (Leishman, 2004).

The introduction to this thesis made clear that it took the form of an artistic defence, much in the manner of Sir Philip Sydney’s ‘An Apology for Poetry’ (Sydney, 1989). It should be stated, therefore, that this thesis has a clear rhetorical intent. It does not merely present an objective account of an artistic practice. It also seeks to change, in its own small way, the reception of this practice.

It is important to acknowledge, therefore, one final debt that this research programme owes to Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin argued that the future is always open, noting:

“the very moment of transition, of movement from the past and the present into the future, constitutes a moment in me that has the character purely of an event, where I, from within myself, participate

in the unitary and unique event of being. It is in this moment that the issue of the event, the "either/or" of the event, is perilously and absolutely undetermined" (Bakhtin, 1990b:118)

This thesis concludes, therefore, by returning to the assertion by Robert Coover that the golden age of computer-mediated textual art was over. The argument presented by this research and Bakhtin's own argument for the 'absolutely undetermined' nature of the future, requires that this thesis refutes that claim.

The question then arises as to what kind of claims can this thesis make in its stead? For, in avoiding the hubris of earlier advocates of the art form, it must also be careful not to be too muted in its claims. Furthermore, in refuting Coover's Golden Age, it must not make the mistake of making its own epic claims for a mythical age to come.

It must, therefore, make the more modest claim - that it is possible (and only possible at the time of writing) that a change in consciousness of considerable cultural value may owe its origins to the addressivity of certain examples of contemporary computer-mediated textual art.



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## Notes to the Text

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> The short story writer and academic, Robert Coover was the author of the 1992 article 'The End of Books' in which he trumpeted a new dawn of computer-based creative writing.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel Greene recognizes Heath Bunting, Olia Lialina, Alexei Shulgin and the collective Jodi.org as other key artists of this period.

<sup>3</sup> Stallabrass describes Vuk Cosic at the opening of the 1999 net\_condition exhibition laying a wreath at the base of the Net.Art Browser exhibit.

<sup>4</sup> In the 'Opening the Space: Guide' the trAce Online Writing Centre noted that the entrants to 2001 trAce/Alt-X New Media Writing Competition provided some 70 different terms to describe their work (trAce 2003:4).

### Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Rachael Shave defines 'slash' literature as "amateur fan fiction that portrays two (or more) same-sex media characters in a sexualised relationship" (Shave, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> In his article 'Towards a New Poetics in Creative Writing Pedagogy' Paul Dawson draws on the work of the Bakhtin Circle to argue for a shift in "the pedagogical focus" of the Creative Writing workshop from "narrowly formalist conceptions of craft to the social context of literature, but without diminishing the importance of craft as an intellectual skill, and without detracting from the purpose of improving students' writing." (Dawson 2003)

<sup>3</sup> In her paper 'Responding in Kind: Down in the Body in the Undergraduate Poetry Course (Thoughts on Bakhtin, Hypertext, and Cheap Wigs)', Cynthia Nichols describes how she set about addressing the alienated status of poetry as a purely "classroom genre" by utilising Bakhtinian theory to develop a course in which computer-mediated textuality (amongst other techniques) was explored to encourage a sense of 'poetry-as-utterance' (Nichols, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> The Bakhtinian concept of an 'architectonic base' is used in this thesis to describe the systematic elements in the conception of meaning-making provided by Bakhtin and others.

<sup>5</sup> Caryl Emerson argues that Bakhtin outwitted the authoritarian Soviet regime by adopting the nineteenth-century Russian literary strategy of Aesopian writing. This strategy assumes that "the world is allegory, that no one speaks or writes straight, and that every officially public or published text (by definition, censored) has a 'more honest', multilayered, hidden subtext that only insiders can decode." (Emerson, 1997:8)

<sup>6</sup> Eduardo Kac, for example, in his article 'Negotiating Meaning: The Dialogic Imagination in Electronic Art' turns to the work of artists who "pursue the aesthetics of telecommunications media" to argue for benefits derived from 'literal' rather than 'metaphorical' dialogue (Kac 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Holquist argues that the structure of the novel plays an important role in production of heteroglossia- for-itself. He notes that:

"the manifold strategies by which the novel demonstrates and deploys the complexities of relation - social, historical, personal, discursive, textual - are its essence. Heteroglossia is a plurality of relations, not just a cacophony of different voices." (Holquist 1990:88)

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams summarized this Marxist argument as: -

"the whole movement of society is governed by certain dispositions of the means of production and that when these dispositions - forces and relations in a mode of production as a whole - change through the operation of their own laws and tendencies, then forms of consciousness and forms of intellectual and artistic production...change also." (Williams, 1991:196)

<sup>9</sup> In his essay 'The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis' Bakhtin develops his ideas about mechanical reproduction through the metaphor of a 'finger print' by arguing that "it is possible, of course, to reproduce the text by the same mechanical way ( i.e. reprinting) but the reproduction of the text by the subject (a return

to it, a repeated reading, a new execution quotation) is a new, unrepeatable event in the life of the text, a new link in the historical chain of speech communion" (Bakhtin 1986b:106)

### Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> Writing in 1998 Laura Miller noted "I've yet to encounter anyone who reads hypertext fiction. No one, that is, who isn't also a hypertext author or a journalist reporting on the trend" (Miller, 1998)

<sup>2</sup> Chris Funkhouser was kind enough to provide details from his research for this text to me as an e-mail attachment.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Coover's position on the issue of graphics has changed over time. In his 1992 article 'The End of Books' he notes that "graphic elements, both drawn and scanned, have been incorporated into the narratives, imaginative font changes have been employed to identify various voices or plot elements, and there has also been a very effective use of formal documents not typically used in fictions" (Coover, 1992)

<sup>4</sup> The chatterbot program, ELIZA, was developed by the computer scientist Joseph Weizenbaum. It used a pattern-matching algorithm to impersonate the open-ended questioning technique of a Rogerian psychoanalyst.

<sup>5</sup> The story-telling program, Tale-spin, was developed by James Meehan. Espen J. Aarseth notes that it was programmed to "construct simple animal fables of the Aesop type" (Aarseth 1997:12).

<sup>6</sup> The trAce Online Writing Centre developed and managed a number of 'quilt' projects, including 'The Eclipse Quilt', 'The Dawn Quilt', 'The Road Quilt' and 'decade' – details of which can be found in the trAce Archive at <http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk>.

<sup>7</sup> 'Listserv' is a generic term for mailing list applications.

<sup>8</sup> Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is a real-time, text-based group communication application.

<sup>9</sup> A web-log or 'blog' is a website where the entries are displayed as a journal or diary in reverse chronological order. Blogs are often provided with an RSS feed so that readers can be made aware of recent updates.

<sup>10</sup> WIKIpedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>) defines a WIKI as "a type of website that allows the visitors themselves to easily add, remove and otherwise change some available content, sometimes without the need for registration."

<sup>11</sup> Extra-noematic is an unusual adjective denoting an occurrence outside of human thought or consciousness.

<sup>12</sup> Tiny MUD Classic is a text-based, 'multi-user dungeon' program delivered over the Internet from a central database server to users via a telnet connection. It is described as a multi-user program because many players can play at the same time from remote locations.

### Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> In 1994, Stuart Evans observed that practice-based PhDs were "still uncommon" (Evans 1994:9). In 2001, the UK Council for Graduate Education characterised the current period as "early days" (UKCGE, 2001:29).

<sup>2</sup> In 1994, John Dawson argued that "the Field of Art and Design does not have available a researched theoretical body of knowledge of the status and kind that, for example, engineering and science have" (Dawson, 1994:16). The UKCGC Report 'Practice-based Doctorates' also recognized that there was considerable doubt about the epistemology of practice-based research degrees. It sounds a particularly hesitant note when it refers to "one promising way of reaching a satisfactory definition of a PhD or practice-based work" (UKCGE, 1997:8).

<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin argued against the use of footnotes and bibliographical references in his texts; noting that he had 'freed' his study from the superfluous ballast of citations and references, for they lack any direct methodological significance in studies of a non-historical nature" (Bakhtin, 1990:257). However, this thesis argues that the use of scholarly conventions is not inconsistent with the methodology of Bakhtinian hermeneutics in a study with a historical context; and in this case of the thesis, they are also useful because they serve to point the reader towards a number of obscured texts.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Upton was kind enough to send me a copy of his talk to E-Poetry 2003 as an e-mail attachment.

<sup>5</sup> In the course of the last three years I have attended a number of on-line writing workshops organised by Nottingham Trent University - including 'Experimental Writing' led by Alan Sondheim 2001-2002, 'Writing Web Narrative' led by Carolyn Guertin 2002 and 'Flash Poetry' led by Peter Howard 2003-2004.

<sup>6</sup> Dr John Moore died in October 2002. Dr Adrian Page took on the onerous task of being my supervisor shortly after this tragic event.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the door in the tapestry room was designed to be encountered initially in the locked position. However, by locating and picking up the appropriate key in another garden, the reader-participant was able to open this door and to progress to a description of a 'hidden' garden.

<sup>8</sup> See Note 4, Chapter 3 on Page 197 above.

<sup>9</sup> Ilana Snyder notes that "technologies of writing strongly influence the ways in which writers write" (Snyder, 1996:9).

## **Glossary of Terms**

**Addressivity** – The quality of the act of turning to another by which they are defined as a participant in an event of meaning-making.

**Architectonic** – The systematic organization of a body of knowledge.

**Axiology** – A Theory of Value.

**Computer-mediated textual art** – Computer-mediated texts that are either described as, or have come to be taken as, works of art (see Computer-mediated textuality below).

**Computer-mediated textuality** – A term to describe utterances woven from a combination of sound, animation, moving and still images, icons, alphabetic and other semiotic elements mediated by a computer.

**Cybertext** – Espen J.Aarseth's term for a "self-changing text", in which the text is "controlled by an immanent cybernetic agent" such as a human or a computer.

**Dialogism** – A conception of language modelled on the metaphor of dialogue, in which an utterance is made in response to that which has been said, and in anticipation of future responses.

**Epistemology** – A theory of the method or grounds of knowledge.

**Ergodic** – A term coined by Espen J. Aarseth to describe the “nontrivial effort” required to “traverse the text” (Aarseth, 1997: 1). It is derived from the Greek words *ergo* and *hodos* and literally means ‘work-path’.

**Extranoematic** – An adjective denoting an occurrence outside of human consciousness. It is derived from the ancient Greek *Noema*, meaning ‘thought’, prefixed with the Latin *extra* meaning ‘outside of’.

**Hermeneutics** – Systematic theories and methods of interpretation.

**Heteroglossia** – A plural condition of language that arises out of the recognition that it is stratified by social forces into multiple speech genres.

**Hypertext** – Text composed as lexia (blocks of words, moving or static images, or sounds) linked by multiple paths, chains or trails in an open-ended web.

**Materiality** – The condition of the matter of which a thing is made of.

**Methodology** - The science of method; and the body of methods used in a particular branch of research.

**Novelistic Discourse** – The heteroglossic structuring of discourse to facilitate the representation of multiple points-of view.

**Obligatory Uniqueness** – The notion that every event of meaning-making is unique so this uniqueness requires the participants in this event to make a commitment or an act of position-taking which in turn affects the inter-subjectivity of the participants.

**Prodigal** – A lavish and/or recklessly wasteful act or person.

**Responsive understanding** – The notion that the meaning of an utterance is realized by the listener- or reader-participatory through their active participatory engagement with an utterance.

**Speech or Discursive Genres** – A description of language in which it does not take a normative or dictionary form but is instead stratified by social forces into ‘typicals’ or families of utterances shaped by social evaluations.

**Trans-linguistics** – The Bakhtin Circle’s term for their conception of the event of meaning-making. It frames meaning-making in a wider context than linguistics by taking account of issues such as the cultural position of the participants, the context and the address of the utterance.

**Utterance** – The central event of the Bakhtin Circle’s description of meaning-making. The utterance is the term used to describe the socially- and materially-constituted inter-subjective event of active, participatory meaning-making.

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## Appendix 1: Learning, Ontology and Poiema

### The Script of Learning

*Note:- the names of the individual lexia are marked in square bracket []*

We are learning

About the masks	[masks]
in the windows	[window1]
and the window	[window2]
about mannequin mummies	[mannequin]
Who question your eyes	[eyes1]
Who quest in your eyes	[eyes2]
with drastic perfection	[drastic]
with plastic perfection	[plastic]
and perfidious smiles	[smiles]
who throw you a line	[line]
and length in the dark	[length]
and sport for a catch	[catch]
with their knowledge of tides	[tides]

We are learning

the steps of the dance	[dance]
the come hithers	[come]
and withers	[withers]
the harlequin heartbreaks of	[harlequin]



chagrin and sin	[chagrin1]
from fly fallen angels	[fallen]
to keen Casanovas	[Casanovas]
We're ridden by fate	[fate1]
We're riddled by fate	[fate2]
And the illusions of space	[space]
chagrin and shine	[chagrin2]
black blood in moonlight	[blackblood]
beast on the stair	[beast]
feast on the stair	[feast]
found in the roodloft	[rood]
no reason to be there	[there]
moths in a twilight	[moths]
sunless Hafren	[hafren]
seeking the father	[father]
the return to the dream	[dream]
the return on the dream	[dream2]
the return from the dream	[dream3]
petulant peacocks	[peacocks]
strutting their fortune	[strut]
pockets much deepened	[pockets]
by this winter of meaning	[meaning]
by a winter of meetings	[meeting]

We are learning

That beyond each line [beyond]

There are other lines moaning [moaning]

Rich in their darkness [rich]

Rich in the darkness [rich2]

Rich with their darkness [rich3]

Rich with the darkness [rich4]

Riddled with guilt [guilt]

Riddled with gilt [gilt]

Riding provisos [provisos]

they come calling [calling1]

they come crawling [crawling1]

come calling [calling2]

come crawling [crawling2]

content to know home [home1]

content to no home [home2]

contempt to no home [home3]

contempt for no home [home4]

We are learning

ever learning [ever]

to slip shiver-quiver [slip]

to trance; mirror motive [mirror]

Swim to the shoal [swim]

Shim with the shoal	[shim]
Authors in oceans	[authors1]
Authors of oceans	[authors2]
Authors with oceans	[authors3]
Authorless oceans	[authors4]
Confessed by the current	[current]
Emergent	[emergent]
Performance	[performance]
So wasted on whales	[whales]

We are learning

To weave in thorns	[thorns]
To martyr roads	[martyr]
As well as feet	[feet]
To wake the miles of briared bush	[briar]
To earn our errand	[errand]
of desert scrub	[scrub]

We are learning

To weave in thorns	
of martyred rose	[martyred]
of flaming bush	[bush]
of the fruitless threads	[fruitless]
of pageantry	[pageantry]

We are learning

To weave in thorns

[thorns]

To martyr roads

[martyr]

Instead of feet

[instead]

To curse the way

[way]

that's made before

[before1]

that's laid before

[before2]

to cherish fork

[fork]

and cross

[cross]

and snare

[snare]

We are learning

To feast

[feasting]

On Heart-sore

[heartsore]

Heuristics

[heuristics]

Moment within moment

[moment]

To be royalty in senses

[royalty]

Cloaked in our smiles

[cloaked]

To reign without maps

[maps]

Without hope- springs

[hope]

Without taxes

[taxes]

a-bridled

[bridled]

but bucking	[but]
Waiting	[waiting]
Weighting	[weighting]
For dane-geld	[gold]
Throned	[throned]
Foamed	[foamed]
by the ocean	[ocean]
Kanute! Kanute!	[kanute]
Shamed by the shore	[shamed]

We are learning

In tar-pools	[tar]
To be fish for a flame	[fish]
To be spit-slick	[slick]
And laval	[laval]
To be devilled	[devils]
Deliquescent	[Deliquescent]
Abandoned by old ways	[old]
Unnervingly new	[new1]
unsuited to new	[new2]
unlikely as new	[new3]
disabled by new	[new4]
disgustingly new	[new5]
present and new	[new6]

unashamedly new [new7]

evolved to the new [new8]

We are learning

Mitigation [mitigation]

‘gainst harshness and oceans [harshness]

‘gainst hardness of oceans [hardness]

The commandings of chaos [command]

Unstintingly vast [vast]

[blank2]

We are learning [learning2]

of limits [limits]

with a sweet river-maiden [river]

a bound silver tear [tear]

from the heart of the land. [land]

For she will eat salmon [salmon]

Called to come home [called]

Fated to know death [death]

Destined to no fate [fate]

gravel-trapped [gravel]

in her bed. [bed]

**The Text of Ontology**

i am the eye of a steel bright needle  
threaded by time; by a pin-sized camel.

i am the eye at the heart of the storm  
that rages and howls, and gives like a baby.

i am the eye that is seeing but blind;  
that can not conceive, the rape of itself.

i am the aye, affirmed by tradition  
trapped in old phrases that i rarely now use.

i am the aye, that claims to mean yes.

It's hard to be sure. Can we take my word?

i am the aye, or am i an aye-aye?  
Dictionary claims i'm half a lemur.

i am the i at the heart of an -ism.  
Rip-tide and rocks; possessed and possessing.

i am that i that you never should cross.

i demand to be in capital letters!

i am the i with an atomic dot.

Once indivisible, now just a joke.

**Script to Poiema**

*One of the following 16 phrases is selected randomly (as a call):-*

“You will seek me...”

“You will cleanse me...”

“You will scour me...”

“You will hate me...”

“You will right me...”

“You will carve me...”

“You will chain me...”

“You will know me...”

“You will feed me...”

“You will lose me...”

“You will break me...”

“You will toast me...”

“You will find me...”

“You will gag me...”

“You will maim me...”

“You will loathe me...”

*It is then followed by a muttering agreement. The muttering agreements are:-*

“...Seek...”

“...Cleanse...”



“...Scour...”

“...Hate...”

“...Right...”

“...Carve...”

“...Chain...”

“...Know...”

“...Feed...”

“...Lose...”

“...Break...”

“...Toast...”

“...Find...”

“...Gag...”

“...Maim...”

“...Loathe...”

*It is then followed by one of the following ‘response’ phrases (to make a completed sentence). These are selected by the user passing the mouse over one of the buttons in the circle of buttons:-*

“...while nails bite through your arms”

“...with your lanterns, told as truths”

“...before the brazen doors”

“...on an altar dressed in flames”

“...despite the weight of grief”

“...with random standing waves”

“...in teardrops brimmed with rum”

“...through the inroads made by lust”

“...as moonrise slicks the sky”

“...beneath the glass-filled square”

“...beyond the savage sea”

“...and still the dots make lines”

“...after paying all your debts”

“...despite your clouded eyes”

“...through swimming for the shore”

“...and still we cry for more”

## Appendix 2 – The Script to Homecoming

### Introduction

Opening Titles: Homecoming: a medi{t}ation by Gavin Stewart

Bakhtin Quote: “Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival”.

Question Button: Are you willing?

Question Button (on rollover): Are you willing to welcome the prodigal?

Setting: Crowd cheers; a clash of bright colours.

*(The main screen is revealed; a series of changing buttons with strange repetitive voice recordings with links to the following meditations)*

The Box

Choreographer

M/other

Underground

Moon Road

Guidance Notes for a Young River

Gross

Understanding

*(Return to this screen will reveal the changing buttons ‘rolled up’ at the top of the screen with a series of texts)*

1. Is reading still a hidden act?
2. A secret virtue
3. Or a loss of touch?
4. A Sweet Communion
5. Now with then,
6. Love with haste?
7. Is reading flowing
8. Or the art of dying?

**Common File Elements**

*Roll-over elements for the Name Button:-*

What does home mean to you?

Shouldn't your name be here as well?

Is this a meditation?

Does Gavin call this piece finished?

Do you ever feel like you want to go home from the party?

Is change the only thing that is truly unchanging?

Are you participating in this text?

What does the sea mean?

Where does language come from?

Shall I call you 'Dear Reader'?

## The Box

Opening Titles: The Box

Bakhtin Quote: "For in order to live and act, I need to be unconsummated, I need to be open for myself - at least in all the essential moments constituting my life; I have to be, for myself, someone who is axiologically yet-to-be..."

*(The main screen is revealed; a box in the middle of the screen with the text 'To move' in its centre)*

Option 1 (Spring)

To move

In a dance

An uncoying

Of Spring.

Both shimmy-shammy and

The fermenting of lust.

To flow

For the rapids

Down hill

demanding

A torrential

temptation

called by the sea.

This flood

knows the fields;

An earth

arabesque

Option 2 (Summer)

To move

Triumphant

Samson      aglow

Power possessed

You cast off

your chains.

To think

Anew

With a mind

full of promise

To burn off the mists

dry leavings of scholars

To see

your own eyes

An American shore.

Option 3 (Autumn)

To move

Relentless

Machinic all motion.

Change is a hammer

A forge for the head.

Temper and torque

All twisting and torsion;

Never the time

for casting of fools.

To beat

'til senseless

Sparks on the wind.

Who wants to be old Sisyphus' child?

And Vulcan's a bomber

All good for a warrior;

You know to stay clear

of the heat from the forge



Option 4 (*Winter*)

To move

Again (*sigh*)

These shiftings        unending

A craven-bound shunt of assiduous thought.

It rumbles through life

To the customs point;

Raising up hems and the chokings of dust.

To rouse

Once more

This arthritic sad engine;

Freighted on down with

time and this choice.

Its trailing meat wagons

Fat; full of fingers

That nick and then lick

At scabs of old truths.

**Choreographer**

Opening Titles:       Choreographer

Bakhtin Quote:        "the unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and  
being                    born) is not separated by clearly defined boundaries"

*(The main screen is revealed; an image of a ballet dancer in a pink spotlight)*

Question Button:      How big is your soul?

*(The ballet dancer begins to dance)*

Voice Recording:      How big is your soul?

Followed by a selection from:

*(If Purple)*

1. Leap
2. Hop
3. Skip
4. Spin
5. Reel
6. Whirl
7. Bound

8. Jump
9. Trip
10. Jaunt

*(If Red)*

1. Snap
2. Strain
3. Rip
4. Tear
5. Rend
6. Grind
7. Break
8. Crack
9. Grate
10. Rasp

*(If Yellow)*

1. Grasp
2. Force
3. Clutch
4. Seize
5. Clasp
6. Grab
7. Strive

8. Test

9. Try

10. Snatch

*(If Blue)*

1. Soar

2. Fly

3. Wheel

4. Sweep

5. Flounce

6. Vaunt

7. Strut

8. Storm

9. Rise

10. Grow

Voice Recording: How big is your soul?

Followed by a selection from:

1.

How big is your soul?

Is it compressed into starlight?

A pin-prick of angels?

A gasping for air

In the tightness of place?

2.

How big is your soul?

Does it stretch through your mouth?

Long like a voice?

Does it steal down the thunder?

or shake the dull earth?

3.

How big is your soul?

Does it trip to your tongue?

Can it fish-wiggle air?

Does it spread with your words

All spoken in haste?

4.

How big is your soul?

Does it leach from your eyes?

Spear sheer through the darkness?

Does it trace the long rays

All the way to the stars?

5.

How big is your soul?

Can it flow with your tears

And ease a parched desert?

A streaming of water

That demands a new view?

6.

How big is your soul?

Can it vent from your nose?

A gas-dragon fury?

Can it fill a whole room

With its poisonous fumes?

7.

How big is your soul?

Does it live in your chest?

A drum beat of hope?

Can it dance for a pretty?

Make magical beats?

8.

How big is your soul?

Does it growl through your guts?

All inward absorbing

Is it curled round a liver

Or centred and warm?

9.

How big is your soul?

Is it winged like a vampire?

A terror of flight?

Pity young Icarus

No hope from escape!

10.

How big is your soul?

Does it reach to your feet

As they run down the dawn?

The search of fresh fortunes

And the curse from the night?

11.

How big is your soul?

Can it reside in your past?

A nostalgia for armchairs,

Is it happiest to be dressed

In clothes of a ghost?

12.

How big is your soul?

Does it span merely moments

Or lifetimes of loves?

Can reach beyond blood

And find a new host?

13.

How big is your soul?

Does it range over cities

All armoured and rolling?

Can it punch through a wall

Of concrete and steel?



14.

How big is your soul?

Does it encompass a journey?

An ocean of tales?

The lives that we lived

As lived out their lies?

15.

How Big is your Soul?

Does it feed on a text

By worming through words?

Can it think through profusion

A crowd without kings?

Back Ground text selected from:-

1. Control
2. Order
3. Dictate
4. Direct
5. Specify
6. Arrange

7. Plan
8. Manage
9. Rule
10. Instruct
11. Bid
12. Route
13. Chart
14. Cope
15. Conceive
16. Conjure
17. Ask
18. Drill
19. Summon
20. Invoke

**M/other**

Opening Titles: M/other

Bakhtin Quote: “Just as the body is formed initially in the mother's womb (body), person's consciousness awakens wrapped in another's consciousness.”

Setting: The initial screen is revealed, an image and sound of a distressed baby

Question Button: Can you help me?

Question Button (on rollover): Can you help me with words?

Setting: The main screen is revealed; a central circular image and a series of questions beginning ‘All is...’.

Question 1 - All is pain and you offer me...

Possible Answer 1. Pain

Possible Answer 2. Love

Question 2 - All is hunger and you offer me...

Possible Answer 1. Hungry?

Possible Answer 2. Food

Question 3 - All is thirst and you offer me...

Possible Answer 1. Thirsty?

Possible Answer 2. Drink?

Question 4 - All is dark and you offer me...

Possible Answer 1. Bedtime?

Possible Answer 2. Night?

Question 5 - All is cold and you offer me...

Possible Answer 1. Cold?

Possible Answer 2. Warm?

Question 6 - All is chaos and you offer me...

Possible Answer 1. Gifts

Possible Answer 2. Language

Question 7 - All is love and you offer me...

Possible Answer 1. Home

*(The main screen then reveals a series of circles around the central circular image.*

*The text loops 'all is ...' etc., followed by a selection from the lexia below)*

## 1. Pain

first mentor	swift sadist	you shriek out	the present
the pit fall	a promise	the lessons	worth knowing

## 2. Love

you're moon-faced	a mother	glowing	all goodness
a soothing	love cooing	fix ache	with a word

## 3. Hungry

this gnawing	rats hollow	serpentine	seizure
its tortures	are of me	a message	of god

## 4. Food

ingested	ur-ordered	symbolic	and substance
i eat you	a votive	milk-flowing	my breast

## 5. Thirst

a desert	me/needy	loss wander	all dunes
the dryness	unlikely	as the wind	stops my tongues

## 6. Drink

mouth/channelled	this river	will stream	through this life
an endless	reminder	for a past	in the deep

## 7. Sleep

a tide pull	me/waning	temptation	to drown
a swaddling	in waters	the memory	divine

## 8. Night

blood-howling	this sun death	a nightmare	returned
reviled through	the Big Cat	that hunted	our caves

## 9. Cold

beaked devil	a tooth-skin	your poison	bites deeply
a murder	of pin-heads	my angels	need sun

## 10. Warm

a wombing	encircled	safety	be held
me/mother	a bonding	a hearth-life	in love

## 11. Gifts

this offer	to Trojans	Cassandra	a wailing
dance in	to the city	the gate	stands ajar

## 12. Language

prosthetic	the vestment	placebo	of power
the priest need	for islands	a shoreline	defined

1. Wave after wave      the sea shapes the shore
2. Word after word      the sea shapes the shore
3. Woe after woe      the sea shapes the shore
4. Wall after wall      the sea shapes the shore
5. Watch after watch      the sea shapes the shore
6. Welt after welt      the sea shapes the shore
7. While after while      the sea shapes the shore
8. Why after why      the sea shapes the shore
9. Win after win      the sea shapes the shore

- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 10. Wish after wish | the sea shapes the shore |
| 11. Wolf after wolf | the sea shapes the shore |
| 12. Writ after writ | the sea shapes the shore |

## **Moon Road**

Opening Titles: Moon Road

Bakhtin Quote: “It is only from my unique place that the meaning of the ongoing event can become clearer, and the more intensely I become rooted in that place, the clearer that meaning becomes.”

*(The main screen then reveals an image of the moon emerging from dark water)*

Question Button: Goddess?

You call me

O Goddess

Bound by blind worship. You

Fling out all rite

beyond yourself.

You crave me

Your Mother

Bolt-hole and beacon

The half-life of chance

In the blood-hunting

world.



I call you

My Sisters.

Maya        lost siblings. Drawn  
to your last veils; your swaddlings of mist.

For

For despite my high throne  
My face on the old heavens  
I yearn your frail skins; your sweet sense  
to touch.

And so at these times  
I charm the great waters  
roll out my light  
as a brief  
lenten road.

I whisper  
It's time  
Give belief to odd moments

But in the dark the sea churns  
and  
Reviles my stone face.

Goddess Names: A series of buttons to be selected in the sea section of the image

Anahita

Ashtoreth

Arianrhod

Bubastis

Coyolxauhqui

Hina

Hecate

Astarte

Diana

Europa

Luna

Cynthia

Phoebe

Munychia

Selene

Mani

Cerridwen

Yin

## Guidance Notes for a Young River

Opening Titles: Guidance Notes for a Young River

Bakhtin Quote: “The present is something transitory, it is flow, it is an eternal continuation without beginning or end.”

Setting: A Central Image of a Drop falling from an Icicle; surrounded by 2 banks of 10 buttons in the form of changing images of rivers.

### *Part 1. The Hillside Stream*

Position 0		If there's a sea
Position 1:	Version 1:	then speed on towards it;
	Version 2:	then rush off towards it;
	Version 3:	then dash off towards it;
	Version 4:	then tear off towards it;
	Version 5:	then race on towards it;
	Version 6:	then crash down towards it;
	Version 7:	then run on towards it;
	Version 8:	then sprint towards it;
	Version 9:	then sprint towards it;
Position 2	Version 1:	Be lamb-like; a gambol; A prance through the rock fall
	Version 2:	Be babble; a tongue-ful Of artful rejoinders.
	Version 3:	Be playful; a dolphin And surf past the boulders.

	Version 4:	Be fearless; a dragon Spring gold from its seams.
	Version 5:	Be hungry as winter Then sing down the Spring.
	Version 6:	Be watchful; an eagle High on lean air.
Position 3:		Next
Position 4:	Version 1	Hurtle down hill; be
	Version 2:	Career down the slope; be
	Version 3:	Hasten down hill; be
Position 5:	Version 1:	Blind in your youth.
	Version 2:	Sure in your strengths
	Version 3:	Gifted with wings
	Version 4:	Fated to fall
	Version 5:	Moments of love
	Version 6:	Fearless in flight
	Version 7:	Daring and do
	Version 8:	Lost to the drop
Position 6:	Version 1:	and arc from the cliff
	Version 2:	and spring for the sky;
	Version 3:	and question the air;
Position 7:	Version 1:	Fall heavy; a curse.
	Version 2:	Make thunder and mist.
	Version 3:	And fling out a tear.

*Part 2- The Meeting of Small Streams*

- Position 8:   Version 1:   If there's a chance  
   Converge; Conjoin
- Version 2:   If there's another  
   Cohabit; Consume
- Version 3:   If there's a meet  
   Combine; Convey
- Position 9:   Version 1:   A knotful of eels;  
                   Version 2:   A headful of braid;  
                   Version 3:   A lacing of lives  
                   Version 4:   A plaiting of tales;  
                   Version 5:   A weaving of woes;
- Position 10:   Version 1:   Be power in plenty  
                   Version 2:   Be potent together  
                   Version 3:   Be plural then mingle
- Position 11   Version 1:   Then own all the flood  
                   Version 2:   Then claim all the streams  
                   Version 3:   Then bind them; these becks
- Position 12:   Version 1:   and torrent, triumphant  
                   Version 2:   and file out your banks  
                   Version 3:   and surge on, a landmark  
                   Version 4:   and tear out the bedrock  
                   Version 5:   and carve out your course
- Position 13:   Version 1:   Be onward, a mustang

- Version 2: Be forwards, all progress
- Version 3: Be action, all churning
- Version 4: Be rebel, all slogans
- Version 5: Be lashing, a heartache
- Position 14: Version 1: A riot of names.
- Version 2: A battle of claims.
- Version 3: A dazzle of chains.
- Version 4: A music of strains.

*Part 3 – Out on the Plain*

- Position 15: If there's a valley
- Position 16: Version 1: Or harsh-hallowed plain, then
- Version 2: Or desert of dust, then
- Version 3: Or jungle of lust, then
- Position 17: Version 1: take them; your soil
- Version 2: make them; your home
- Version 3: shake them; a quake
- Version 4: break down their doors
- Position 18: Version 1: be a cobra in coils
- Version 2: be a melody of curves
- Version 3: be swooping and swift
- Version 4: be full-flood and drought
- Version 5: be Janus; all grief
- Position 19: Version 1: be wary of dams
- Version 2: be cagey of spans

- Version 3: be swift through a lake
- Position 20: Version 1: Dive on, through their cities
- Version 2: Drive on, through their fields
- Version 3: Strive on, through their fish nets
- Position 21: Version 1: Be a parent to loss.
- Version 2: Be a scourge of their sleep.
- Version 3: Be a bathing of hope.

*Part 4 – Coming to the Sea*

- Position 22: Version 1: And if you falter
- Version 2: And if you stumble
- Version 3: And if you waver
- Position 23: Version 1: As you come near your end
- Version 2: As you come near your goal
- Position 24: Version 1: be ooze-mud, munificence;  
all ox shit and pearl
- Version 2: be wildness; a reed-marsh  
a revenant from youth
- Version 3: be twisting, a temper  
A fragment of lives
- Position 25: Version 1: And then commit to your marriage  
with the far-seeing shores.
- Version 2: And then submit to your passing  
By drowning all tears.

Facets of the River – As Reveals

1. Be
2. Flow
3. Flash
4. Flood
5. Frenzy
6. Leap
7. Gush
8. Surge
9. Pour
10. Pound
11. Play
12. Heave
13. Great
14. Mighty
15. Vast
16. Huge
17. Lost
18. Limbo
19. Spent
20. Gone



**Gross**

Opening Titles: Gross

Bakhtin Quote: "...exaggeration has a positive, assertive character..."

Setting: 144 white square buttons.

1.	Gross	Gross
2.	Intoxicating	Mashed
3.	They were singing	They were animals
4.	Uncomplicated	Mindless
5.	A slap-up meal	Screaming out " <i>you slapper!</i> "
6.	Best of times	Worst of times
7.	Heads down	Blood-lust
8.	No nonsense	No thought whatsoever
9.	Uninhibited	Uncaring
10.	Magnificent	Moronic
11.	These rebellious fellows	These fornicating fiends
12.	Uncomplicated	Shallow
13.	Happy go lucky	Lager louts
14.	Crowd-pulling	Rabble
15.	Clubbing	Clubbing
16.	Street party	Street crime
17.	One for the road	Face down in the road
18.	One of the boyz	One of the many
19.	Out on the tiles	Get them out for the boys

20.	Fondle	Penetration
21.	Fertility and growth	Rape...pure and simple
22.	Brimming-over abundance	Alcohol poisoning
23.	Spirit of adventure	Spirit as chaser
24.	Open to the public	Trashed in the public
25.	Free, as in liberty	Free, as in beer
26.	The world is your oyster	Flex a bit of muscle
27.	Paint the town red	Blood in the gutters
28.	A good time	A jolly good kicking
29.	Knock about fun	Hammered
30.	Get it down your neck	Get it down your shirt
31.	A masked parade	A masked robbery
32.	Sozzled	Shit-faced
33.	Eat up	Puke up
34.	Great stuff	Grotesque
35.	Venus de Milo	Mooning the cops
36.	Dancing in the streets	Pissing in the street
37.	Smiling and happy	Mindlessly Vacant
38.	Held spell-bound	Held prisoner
39.	Let's dance	Let's get 'em
40.	and Nosh	Then vomit
41.	A Dreamtime	A Nightmare
42.	Tear down the road	Tear down the Bastille
43.	Get it on, get it on	Get him off!
44.	The Big Easy	The Big Sleep

45.	Caressing	Pawing
46.	Moonlight	No light
47.	No strings attached	String up the bastards
48.	Adonis	A dickhead
49.	Loved up	Fucked up
50.	Diana, my love	Angina, my chest
51.	Hanging out with the mates	Hanging is too good for them
52.	Humanity	Sodding Animals
53.	Without a care	Can't remember a thing!
54.	Feeling part of the action	Torn apart by the mob
55.	Oh Kiss me!	Snog-a-dog
56.	He was gorgeous	He was out of it
57.	A Hunk; A spunk	A Drunk
58.	Best bib and tucker	Pale-faced and sweaty
59.	Awesome	Awful
60.	Up West!	Gone West!
61.	Nice one matey!	One Last One
62.	Get a room!	Get away from me!
63.	Drink	Defecation
64.	At Night fall	Your Downfall
65.	We are the champions	We are going to get you
66.	Sowing some wild oats	Stitch that!
67.	Get down	Get Up!
68.	Passion	Possession
69.	A bit of fun	A bit of fluff

70.	Bacchus	Brewers Droop
71.	Gay relativity	Queer bashing
72.	Carnival	Carnival
73.	Carnival	Carnival
74.	Gay relativity	Queer bashing
75.	Bacchus	Brewers Droop
76.	A Bit of fun	A bit of fluff
77.	Passion	Possession
78.	Get down	Get Up!
79.	Sowing some wild oats	Stitch that!
80.	We are the champions	We are going to get you
81.	At Night fall	Your Downfall
82.	Drink	Defecation
83.	Get a room!	Get away from me!
84.	Nice one	Last One
85.	Up West!	Gone West!
86.	Awesome	Awful
87.	Best bib and tucker	Pale-faced and sweaty
88.	A Hunk	A Drunk
89.	He was gorgeous	He was out of it
90.	Oh Kiss me!	Snog-a-dog
91.	Feeling part of the action	Torn apart by the mob
92.	Without a care	Can't remember a thing!
93.	Humanity	Sodding Animals
94.	Hanging out with the mates	Hanging is too good for them

95.	Diana, my love	Angina, my chest
96.	Loved up	Fucked up
97.	Adonis	A dickhead
98.	No strings attached	String up the bastards
99.	Moonlight	No light
100.	Caressing	Pawing
101.	The Big Easy	The Big Sleep
102.	Get it on	Get him off!
103.	Tear down the road	Tear down the Bastille
104.	A Dream	A Nightmare
105.	and Nosh	Then vomit
106.	Let's dance	Let's get 'em
107.	Held spell-bound	Held prisoner
108.	Smiling and happy	Mindlessly Vacant
109.	Dancing in the streets	Pissing in the street
110.	Venus de Milo	Mooning the cops
111.	Great	Grotesque
112.	Eat up	Puke up
113.	Sozzled	Shit-faced
114.	A masked parade	A masked robbery
115.	Get it down your neck	Get it down your shirt
116.	Knock about fun	Hammered
117.	A good time	A jolly good kicking
118.	Paint the town red	Blood in the gutters
119.	The world is your oyster	Flex a bit of muscle

120.	Free, as in liberty	Free, as in beer
121.	Open to the public	Trashed by the public
122.	Spirit of adventure	Spirit as chaser
123.	Brimming-over abundance	Alcohol poisoning
124.	Fertility and growth	Rape...pure and simple
125.	Fondle	Penetration
126.	Out on the streets	Get them out for the boys
127.	One of the boyz	One of the many
128.	One for the road	Face down in the road
129.	Street party	Street crime
130.	Clubbing	Clubbing
131.	Crowd-pulling	Rabble
132.	Happy go lucky	Lager louts
133.	Uncomplicated	Shallow
134.	These rebellious fellows	These fornicating fiends
135.	Magnificent	Moronic
136.	Uninhibited	Uncaring
137.	No nonsense	No thought
138.	Heads down	Blood-lust
139.	Best of times	Worst of times
140.	A slap-up meal	Screaming out "you slapper!"
141.	Uncomplicated	Mindless
142.	They were singing	They were animals
143.	Intoxicating	Mashed
144.	Gross	Gross

## Underground

Opening Titles: Underground

Bakhtin Quote: "I am incapable of fitting all of myself into an object!"

Setting: An Image of a Underground Railway Map. City Sound FX.

### *The New Media Line*

I is a city

Never rendered in print.

It changes too fast

For the strictures of ink.

It's a knotwork of noise;

A street-plan of forks.

It's vast, never ending.

A drowning by choice.

### *The Dialogic Line*

I is a city

Fed by all ports. By

Reach and the river;

Full flow of the tide.

It's a torrent of beer  
With meat on its ribs.  
It quaffs with the sailors  
And laughs at the world.

*The Phenomenological Line*

I is a city.  
The canton of time.  
Wall-less; exposed.  
It's turned to the steppes.

It lives through its wits  
In brisk conversations.  
Then scuttles off home  
And cancels all bets.

*The Judicial Line*

I is a city  
Framework in steel.  
A piazza of pain; for  
The tourists and Tastes.



It's certain as centre;  
A trial for the deed.  
A statue of greatness  
To fixedness of place.

*The Capitalist Line*

I is a city  
All traffic and trade  
Now railing, then rich  
On the knife-edge of need.

A haggle of heartland, and  
commodified ways.  
A challenge, a chancing;  
Full chartered by deeds.

*The Soul Line*

I is a city  
Walled by the dead  
With their warships and worship.  
A love of the said.

It's settled; essential,  
So reliably mapped  
That in marble, they sleep  
In unquestioning dread.

*The Constructed Line*

I is a city;  
False pattern in lights  
That seeks to make whole  
Out of wefting, untamed.

A mirage of maybes,  
Emergent; a mob.  
It's madness; unkempt  
When it's given a name.

*The Techno-utopian Line*

I is a city  
A chaos of haste.  
Progress unquestioned;  
Brute bending by will.

White hot in the spotlight

All getting and gone.

It flees toward speed;

All gridlock'd and shrill.

## Understanding

Opening Titles: Understanding

Bakhtin Quote: “A passive understanding of linguistic meaning is no understanding at all”.

Setting: An Image of a downloader. A series of changing antonymic words displayed in the background.

Voicing A: “Understanding is...”

Voicing B: This is followed by a count of numbers selected from five to ninety-five percent.

Voicing C: “Understanding is...”

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. ...eternal
6. ...power
7. ...a steel cage
8. ...the fullness of time
9. ...the one, true god
10. ...obvious
11. ... second nature

12. ... the last resurrection
13. ... the answer
14. ... the gift of the priests of Isis
15. ...when the fat lady sings
16. ...your daily bread
17. ...derived from the Babylonian word for pain
18. ...defined in footnote thirty-seven
19. ...found, mainly in the Peruvian Andes
20. ...six point eight five times ten to the twenty-two
21. ...a bride groom waiting
22. ... a post card from the Fates
23. ...a shop-bought cake
24. ...a frozen sea
25. ...a knife
26. ...estimated to weigh more than twenty-five tons
27. ...is a tar pit
28. ...an archive of the wind
29. ...fury reframed
30. ...a random number between one and one hundred
31. ...a drug they've banned from most universities
32. ... despite rumours to the contrary, not a martial art form
33. ...an airport lounge
34. ...home cooking
35. ...the Lambton Worm biting its tail
36. ...a fire-ship attack

37. ...largely saturated fats and sugar
38. ...the fruit of labour
39. ...a mirror for the emotion
40. ...love without fists
41. ...touring Japan this summer with her new band
42. ...stroking a lop-eared rabbit
43. ...the 'Winter of Discontent'
44. ...running in the Three-Fifteen at Haydock Park
45. ...a cherry blossom day
46. ...the perfect wave
47. ...trailing 8 points in a recent MORI poll
48. ...my favourite position in the Karma Sutra
49. ...the murder of a question
50. ...Friday (with food on the table)
51. ...a board game without any instructions
52. ...road haze
53. ...a wire-frame model
54. ...the refuge of the tame
55. ...a lens made from time
56. ...often scented with Jasmine oil
57. ...is also available in a 5 door hatchback
58. ... tap water, in a sea of sweetened Coke
59. ... the key to the room with many doors
60. ...not the journey
61. ...a bitter harvest worth reaping

62. ...a mountaintop conquered by clouds
63. ... reconstructed out of papier-mâché and wood
64. ... hot chrome glinting
65. ...just outside Cincinnati
66. ...speaking in your mother's voice
67. ...the Greek Horse being pulled into the City
68. ...the smile of a new born
69. ...in the third cage on the right
70. ...often described as the first person to discover America
71. ...a tar pit
72. ...first love remembered
73. ...is being worn longer in Paris this year
74. ...a flight of migrating geese
75. ...rarely included in signal to noise calculations
76. ...unable to come to the phone right now
77. ...raindrops on a bright summer's day
78. ...on third base
79. ...a freight train passing
80. ...cinema for the mind
81. ...rarely found in temperate regions
82. ...the curse of the shirking classes
83. ... the colour of the wind
84. ...not missing in action
85. ...infinity (plus one)
86. ... the answer that generates more questions

87. ...seeing the back of your own head
88. ...a gasping for air
89. ...the faith of the faithless
90. ...ships passing in the night
91. ...Everest (without an oxygen mask)
92. ...the next resurrection
93. ...a silken cage
94. ...the power and the glory
95. ...eternal
96. ...
97. ...
98. ...
99. ...
100. ...

20 Pairs of Antonymic Terms

Passive	Active
Easy	Hard
Fixed	Flexible
Solid	Fluid
Traditional	Innovative
Faithful	Faithless
Sun	Moon
Eternal	Ephemeral
Global	Local



Static	Dynamic
Fire	Water
Land	Sea
Body	Soul
Home	Exile
Legitimate	Illegitimate
Sacred	Secular
Friend	Foe
Mortal	Immortal
Spoken	Written
Sane	Mad

**Sub- Meditation – White Square = Choice**

How many questions have you been asked today?

Answer 1: Less than 20

Answer 2: More than 100

Answer 3: 4291.5

Answer 4: None of the above

How many questions have you been able to answer?

Answer 1: Less than 20

Answer 2: More than 100

Answer 3: 4291.5

Answer 4: None of the above

In your experience is this a typical day?

Answer 1: Yes

Answer 2: No

Answer 3: Wouldn't you like to know

Do you think you understand what is going on?

Answer 1: All of the time

Answer 2: Most of the time

Answer 3:     Some of the time

Answer 4:     None of the time

Do you think you have a choice about answering questions?

Answer 1:     All of the time

Answer 2:     Most of the time

Answer 3:     Some of the time

Answer 4:     None of the time

**Sub-Meditation - My Home in Atlantis**

The house by the sea  
has the keenest of ears  
that tune to the wind  
to the storm-pitching notes.

The house by the sea  
has inquisitive eyes  
that scour the waves  
for signs of repeats.

But the house by the sea  
is hacked out of stone.

It is fixed by a floor  
of time-beaten earth

It's enmeshed by its root  
Into myth spring  
eternal  
Not formed for a chance  
or to live through this change.